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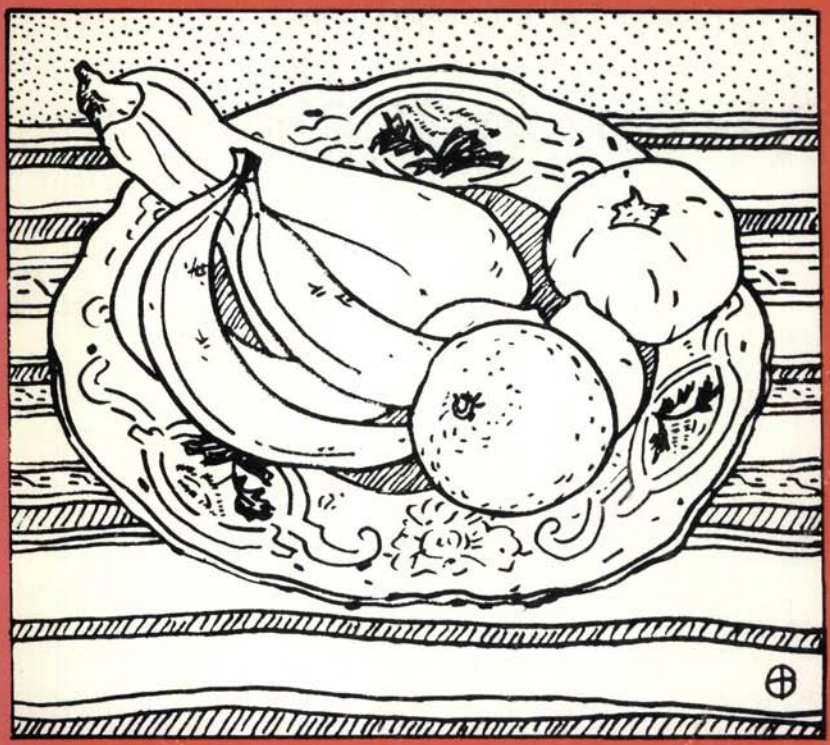

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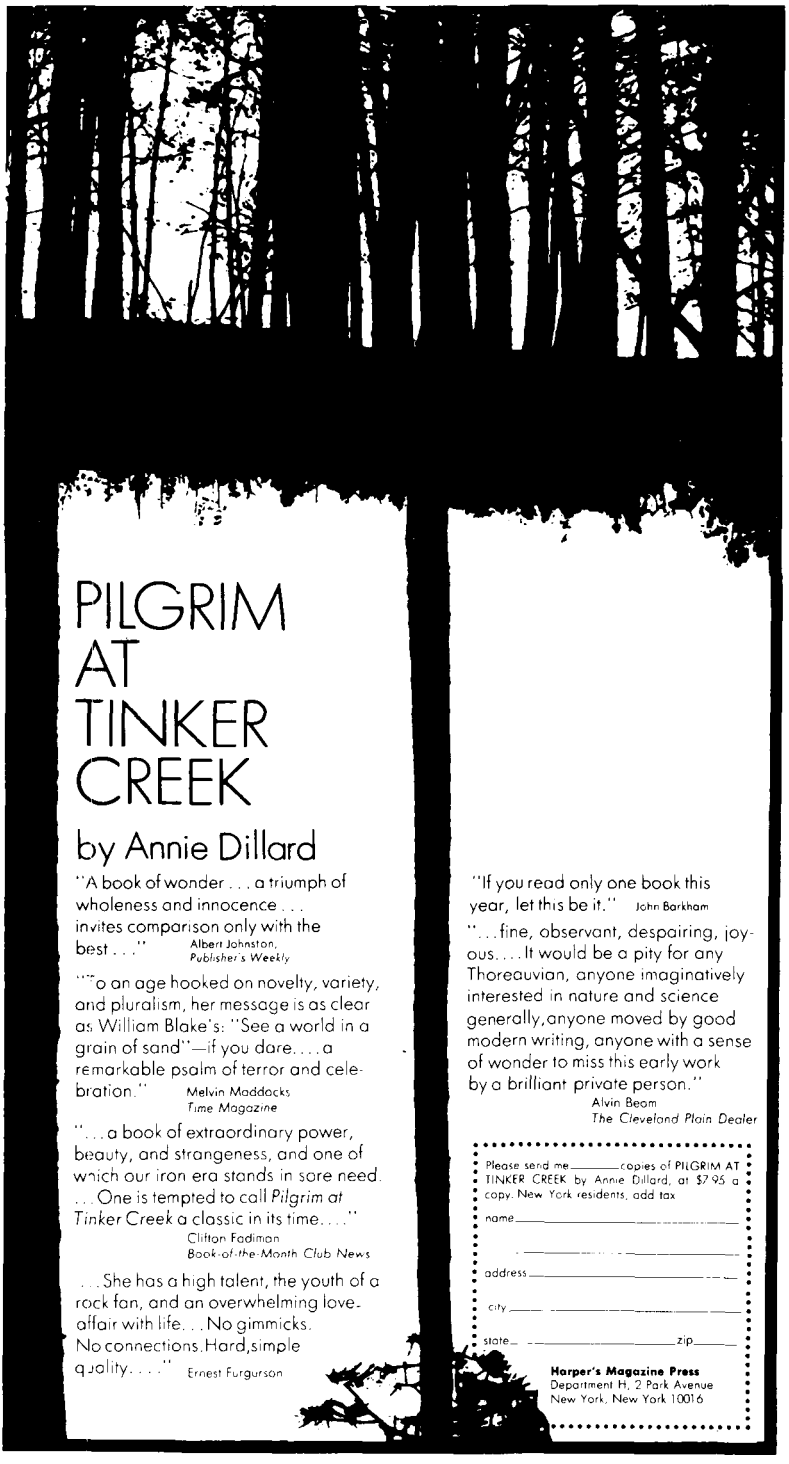

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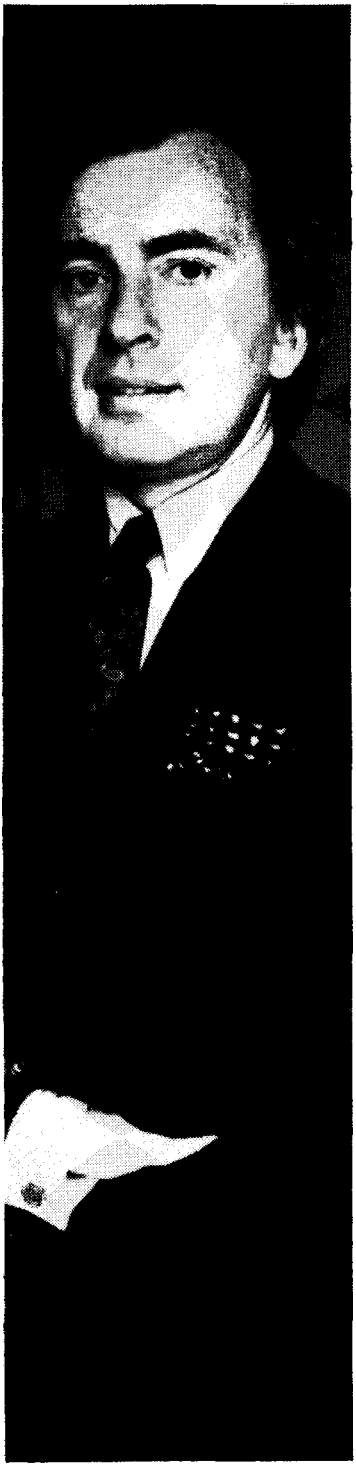

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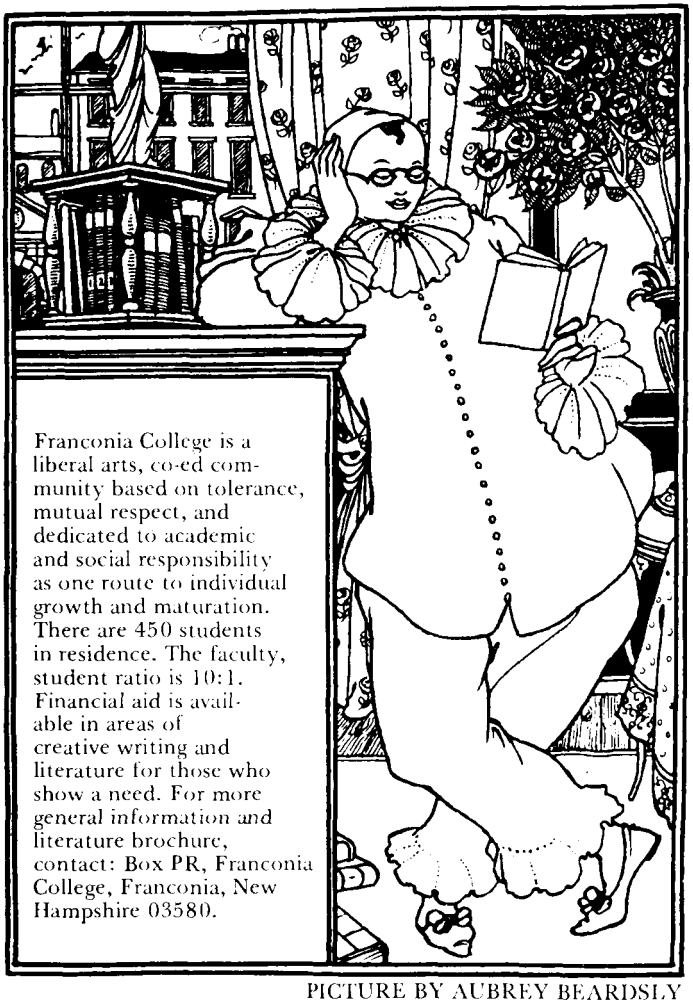

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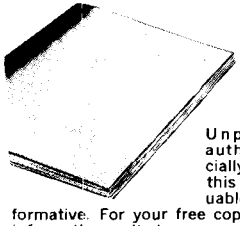

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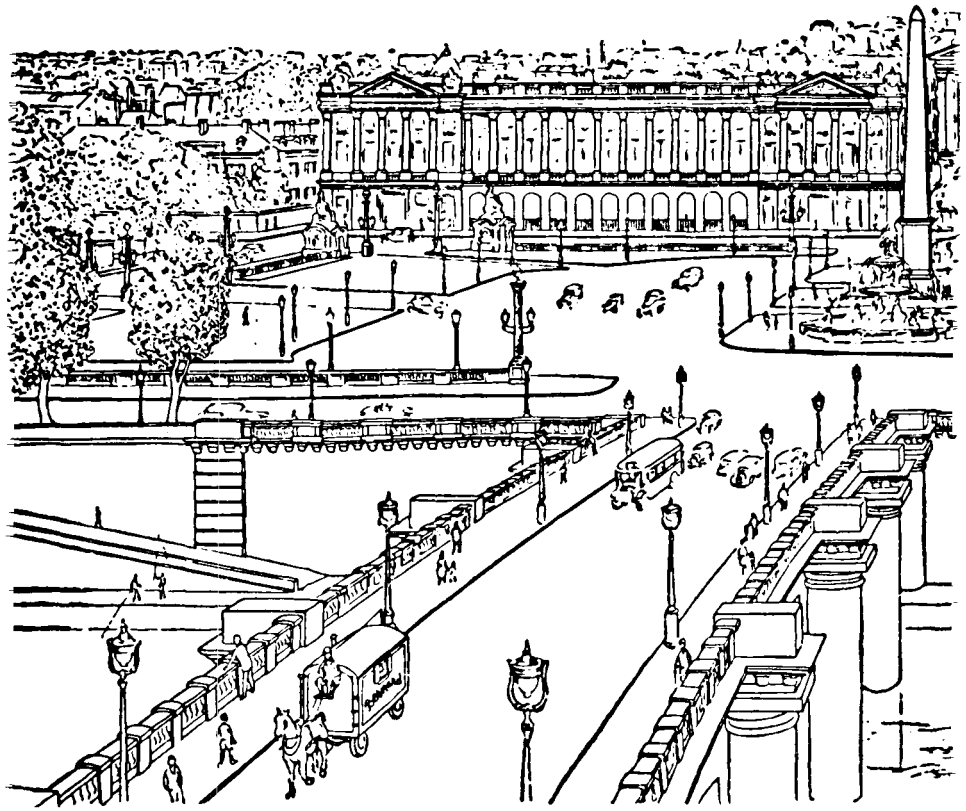

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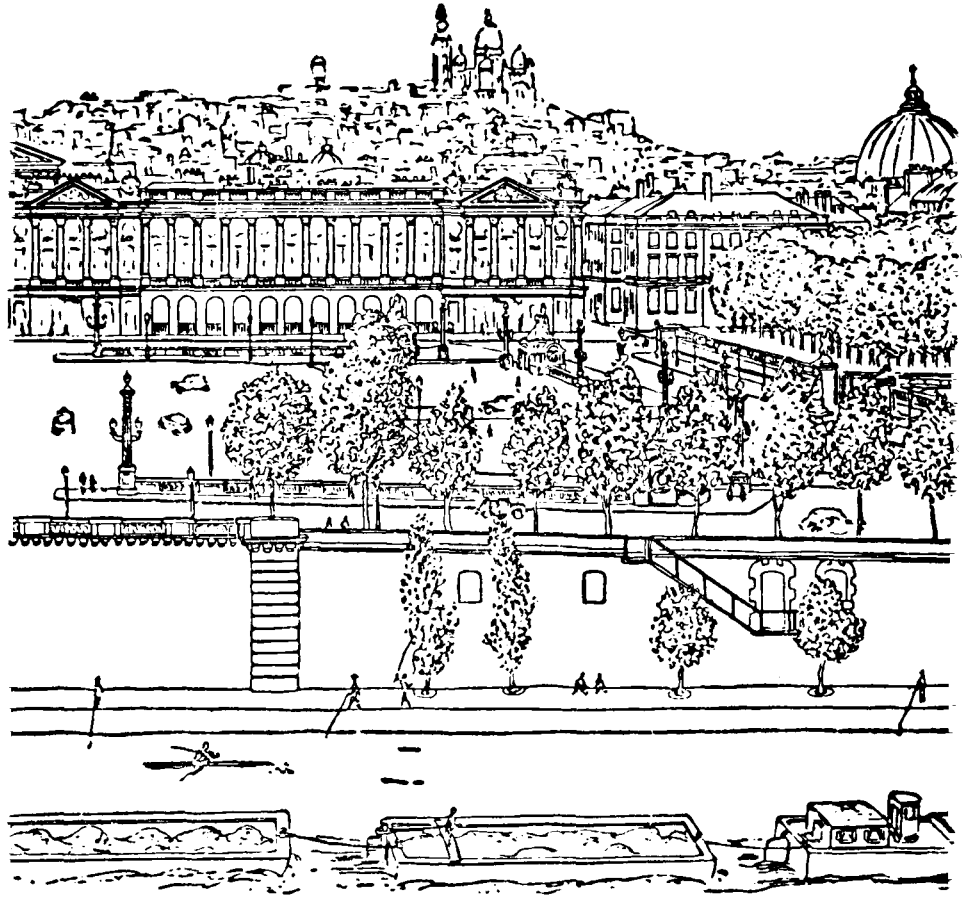

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**Interview**

**Gore Vidal** *The Art of Fiction L* 130

**Art**

**William Wegman** *Portfolio of Drawings* 71

**Prose**

**Frederick Busch** *Widow Water* 108
**Lamar Herrin** *The Rio Loja Ringmaster* 16
**Mike Kempton** *Long Green* 89
**Ray Russell** *Rational Moments* 123
**David Shaber** *Progress Report* 50

**Portfolio**

**Ira Sadoff** *Five Prose Poems* 80

**Poetry**

**Ameen Alwan** *Two Poems* 103
**Paul Anderson** *Falling* 121
**Maxine Chernoff** *Two Poems* 98
**W.K. Engel** *Two Poems* 68
**Albert Goldbarth** *Organization* 107
**Thomas Johnson** *Two Poems* 65
**Erica Jong** *Two Poems* 44
**Greg Kuzma** *Two Poems* 117
**Naomi Lazard** *Two Poems* 41
**David Lehman** *"Greetings Where No Kindness Is"* 105
**Molly McKaughan** *Ms. Delilah Hoffritz* 67
**Rush Rankin** *Poem* 38
**Vern Rutsala** *You* 112
**Aram Saroyan** *Two Poems* 114
**Louis Simpson** *Three Poems* 48
**Albert Stainton** *The Limestone Statue Boxing Factory* 39
**Charles Webb** *Two Poems* 101

*In Memoriam—* *Peter Ardery* 166

*Notes on Contributors* 168


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Lamar Herrin

# The Rio Loja Ringmaster

*— for my father*

I know all about walls. Candide had a wall around his garden, Jonah had a whale-wall deep-down in midpassage. Meursault had his wall of sun. Bartleby, Melville's man, had his cubicle and his staring wall. The wall I had was green, a deep omnivorous green, and as silencing as a battleship lying just off my shore. It rose off a terrace and gave way to a scoreboard that outtowered anything in the skyline of my dreams and my dreams alone were enough to tell me that the seven years I had sat there had already cost me seven more. (Men in my profession were not expected to live out their three-score and ten.) When we were on the road, of course, there were others: some made of wood and plastered with beer, good-grooming and television ads; some that weren't walls at all but fences made of strong, cross-hatched dog-kennel wire; and one concrete one that crawled with a glaucous-leafed ivy. I seemed to have sat beneath them all. When I got up and walked in to do my job they crept up behind me like Birnam Wood.

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When I had done my job they opened like the Symplegades and let me out. (I wasn't one of your unread ballplayers, on the whole an ex-literate, excitably innocent lot.) When the pressure was on (7th game of the World Series, Collier Park, 9th inning, 19—) I reflected on my Hemingway: two things: anyone who can walk away from a plane crash is a remote man; any bull that leaves the bull-pen is as good as hung and quartered unless he be that rare, self-evident Zeus among toros who is gauged by the picadores, stung by the banderillos, and so sublimely de- and re-mythicized by the matador that the crowd demands his *cojones* for posterity and gives him leave to breed. The crowd we had that last day at Collier Park hung out of the stands and writhed like jungle snakes. There wasn't a señorita in a mantilla or a cabellero in a cape to be seen. I survived because I was a fireman and liquid inside. I vomited out the top, shat a muddy stream out the bottom, pissed a torrent out the middle, put out the fire and we won. The stink I left in Collier Park (Wild Card Park, Chip and Putt Park, 8-Count Park, Familyland) I left for good. But not the walls.

This one was made of cactus—straight stalks of organ cactus and patchy flat leaves of the prickly pear. It ran along in front of a cluster of adobe hovels and mesquite shrub, veered on a generous open angle out to a deep center-field and stopped. But down the line, the right-field line, it was as close as that Coliseum screen had been in Los Angeles, and those cacti had needles. The man we had out there was not about to impale himself on them to bring back a "jon-ron." He was not about to do much of anything except shuffle like a hod-carrier (he dug graves) after meaningless fouls. That worried me. After eight innings I was still throwing hard and they, all right-handers except one, were still swinging late. Given my speed, that meant that one late swing early enough on a high fast ball would be enough to get it over. On the other hand, if I hung a curve my ex-wife, who swung a bat as erratically as

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she chose her lovers, could have hit it. So could anyone of those tequila drinkers and lime suckers who sought the shade of a make-shift cantina and a long-standing eucalyptus tree and kept up a lazy, truculent chatter about gringos and their testicles. The other gringo on our team was as bearded as I and a Polish painter who played center-field. He had a Mexican wife but they didn't know that. Win or lose, when the game was over we would be put to the proof of their tequila, their sour Sunday breaths and their yellow snaky eyes. If we drank ourselves into as desperate and mean a mess as they, we would be judged good gringos and allowed to buy the next bottle. If we backed off we might just as well have kept backing into that cactus. You can insult a man's origins in Mexico but not his bottle. In Rio Loja you paid your respects to his cerveza, his pulque, his tequila and his mescal and you took away as a souvenir a hangover that ached like a tree-trunk split open by lightning, and which kept you smoking till game time next Sunday.

This Sunday it was Rio Loja. It was a hot October, end of the rainy season and beginning of the drouth. Burros would soon have their coats in carcass-tufts and dogs their thin abased bellies in the dust. It was the year that Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier celebrated their Match of the Century and Frazier took a century's worth of punishment before being counted out in the fifteenth. And it was the year, the very day, when I had reason to expect I would pitch my first no-hitter, except for a short cactus fence in right and enough rocks in the infield to make a bad bounce true, all the reason in the world.

I had never pitched one. In Little League, Pony League, American Legion, High School, College, Minor Leagues, and the Big Leagues—not one! I had enough one-hitters to string a rosary and enough two-hitters to send Christ back to the cross in every Christ-haunted pueblo in Mexico, but never the big one—never 000000000. I judged it incredible, odds-shattering! Not one! In almost twenty years of toeing

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the rubber (in Rio Loja a warped two by four), swinging into as smoothly intimidating a windup as the game had seen, poising like a ballerina with all my weight back on the left toe, and then coming over the top in an avalanche of devastating power and control, in twenty years of watching the ball pass the batter in a tracer-gleam of light, or of watching it dart down and away on a wicked curve, I had never pitched a no-hitter. I dreamed noughts, emptinesses. I dreamed of big lumberjack swingers fanning the air. I dreamed of nine innings-worth of pitches, each numbered, plotted, and tooled, and each achieving its own apotheosis as it flamed out and blossomed in the catcher's mitt. I dreamed, to my shame, of my ex-wife Lorraine divested of her jargon and brought to her knees by the understanding of what nine perfectly worked innings could mean. And when I was made a reliever and sent like a bastard son to the provinces of the bullpen, I dreamed the dreams with more passion and stealth than was healthy. Nine innings was like an esplanade overlooking a sea of all nature's wealth. Two innings and a third was nit-picking, mop-up work as they say in warfare. When my nerves went so did the poetry. They wanted a De Maupassant for the final touches. I wanted the full compass of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

So committed was I to my dreams that War and Peace in Rio Loja did not seem unworthy of the Master. The Mexicans knew what the game was about. You did not haul off the gringo's car on your back, you filched his pesos one by one. You did not sound the drums for the frontal assault, you got in under his skin and tweezered his nerves. So you bunted, you chopped, you sent enticing little rollers out over the pebbles and waited till one popped up and hit him in the eye. Your gringo was known to hear all the accents of connivance in a strange tongue, so you talked to him. You talked in a flat, dusty desultory twang; you got your rooters talking too. You kept them drifting out towards the field and back towards the cantina; you kept their

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bottles aglint. If the gringo was too broad and wide and easy-going to be troubled by these dust-motes in his eye, you squirted in a little chili-sauce. The umpire began to wobble from more than the sun, burros with front legs hobbled suddenly appeared in short left field. A herd of goats grazed on nothing up the alley in right-center. Women with infants on their rebozoed hips took their seventh-inning stretch just where a Texas-leaguer might fall behind second base. Two of the Sunday drinkers came whooping and zig-zagging onto the field, pelting each other with lime wedges and slapping their sombreros. When they got off, *niños* of course, had to try the same thing. Your Mexican made sure your gringo knew that baseball in Rio Lajo was not played on holy ground. (The fans in Shea Stadium seemed to have had the same notion.) If a gringo was working on a no-hitter, that ground might be steadily profaned.

Another theory had it—and our center-fielder Stanley held the theory to be true—that out in the *campo* and away from the cities there wasn't a Mexican alive who had outlived that Quetzalcoatl business, that down in one little unexcavated chamber of his soul he knew, just as Montezuma knew, the fair-skinned, full-bearded god would return. When he came it was known he would be the possessor of the super-macho fast ball, a super-macho curve, a volcanic finishing power and a skydweller's cool. It was certainly to be expected that his epiphany would be the occasion of a miraculous event.

A no-hitter.

A drowning man sees his life in a flash the third time down. Pitchers going into the ninth behind a trail of goose eggs like air bubbles might see every pitch they've ever thrown.

I almost threw my arm away with Lorraine.

Leo Grossman, a revolutionary by default, got some easy leftover lobs to hit.

Lester King got a dazzling assortment of curves, sinkers,

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sliders, knucklers, and screwballs. Lester got the jugglery he deserved.

Terry I beaned.

Mercedes, a pinch-hitter, took three high and tight for her initiation into life. She sat back down.

Consuelo was still fouling off the best I could throw. When she measured one out it would come back at my head.

Pitchers approaching immortality might welcome a good sobering shot in the head. Pitchers thinking folk-heroic thoughts of and unto themselves might need a crack of reality.

The reality was this:

Grifo, the catcher. To be trusted if only because his ambition couldn't afford another loss. He wanted back in the Mexican minor leagues. A brick-mason, vaguely resentful of everything when not drunk. When drunk reprieved. A full handsome face, slowly sliding off him like wax. A slugger or nothing.

First base, Bariga, the gut. A moody, paunchy prince. Liked to be at the spot of least exertion and maximum control. At first base, capable of dropping or holding the game-winning out. Failure to rise to the high moment. Fulsome and disdainful.

Second base, Roberto. Light sandy face. Castilian strut. Castilian beaked nose. Natty clipped moustache. Stylish and fiery. A taxi-driver.

Shortstop, Jesus. The only full-blooded indian on the team. Skin a lightly-clouded mahogany. Eyes slow and watchful and drugged. A silent, lava-like smile. Young. Good fielder. A gardener on an American estate.

Third base, Juan. All dignity. Well-defined, copper-colored face. Square-shouldered, thin-waisted. Sharply ridged lips. A measured speech. When sober reticent. When drunk philosophic, compassionate. A grain worker.

Left field Perico, the parrot. Young, father of three children, always in motion, always talking, a Picasso face

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in planes. When sober drunk. When drunk beyond the pale. In the United States would have been committed, studied. A gardener with Juan whose speciality was orchids.

Center field, Stanley. A painter of esoteric symbology and a baseball fanatic—a common breed. Heavy eyebrows and sunken eyes, a chilling nocturnal look. The author of numerous reconciliations. A Mexican *criada* for a wife, two step-children, two his. Given to explosive, harangue-ridden speech. Farts in public, cultivates the home. An ex- and now non-marijuana user. When drunk takes a tight grip, sandpapers his sentimentality.

Right field, David. A bandy-legged, bantam-weight gravedigger. Always near his transistor, skulls. Makes tips by posing in open graves for tourists. Wet moronic lower lip. Generous with tequila. The night of the Day of the Dead gets jubilantly, remorsefully drunk. Worthless as a fielder.

Coach and substitute, Juan Antonio or Rana, the frog. Simianly furrowed face. No neck. A tinsmith. Consuelo's father. Carlota's husband. My protector, prosecutor and Aeolian bag of winds for my tenuously anchored life.

Pitcher, Richard Dixon. Thirty years old, tall, fair, full-bearded, and afflicted with monotonously handsome looks that attract attention but don't sustain it. Tenuously anchored. A world series ago a household word in the USA. Known. In hiding. Thinks of his not so remarkable past as a tumor needing excision. His past, in reality, not so malignant. Porous, unwieldy. Still needs excision. Baseball a curse of the House of Dixon handed on and on. Divorced. Childless. Childishly in love.

The opposition: The Rio Loja *Ultimo Esfuerzo* (the Ultimate Effort). Team members conscripted out of every hamlet, ravine and sinkhole in the area. Come to Rio Loja to do market, baseball and cantina duty each Sunday. Short on God-given talent but fearless. A grinning, asperic campesino charm.

The League: *La Liga Regional de Beisbol—Ignacio*

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*Allendes.*

The Region: The northwestern corner of what was once the breadbasket of Mexico. A semi-irrigated, semi-arid, occasionally productive dun-gray volcanic soil. Four villages, two towns. Delores Hidalgo better known for its midnight summons than its baseball. San Miguel, a state-protected colonial town, a museum piece, until recently better known as a haven for part-time Yankee expatriates but now under a Jacobin clean-up and beautification campaign initiated by the Mexican First Lady. Rolling gringo heads with long matted locks. Partially excised. Home. The whole in the center of Mexico, plateau land.

The object at hand: The bottom of the ninth, three Ultimate Efforts. The first a short saturnine one with a watermelon belly, very slow bat, don't hang a curve. The second, famished cheeks, knife-blade nose, reptilian eyes, looking for a fast ball and a flaming kingdom come. Break his back with curves. The last ultimate effort, the lefty, canny, wiry, quick wrists and a good eye, will be waiting for something he can slice into left, has been waiting since the first inning. Keep it in tight on the handle and pray he doesn't bloop one into right.

Pray to God that Dick Dixon who has coasted through enough log-jammed ninth innings in the Big League past gets drunk enough after this game to forget that he prayed to God for fear of the likes of the Rio Lojans. Pray to God that God grants this and then a triptyched balance and an enshrined calm to a life that has overrun too many canvases too wastefully in the past. Pray to the God of strike-outs then to the God of forgetfulness and then to the God of merciful, morningful peace.

"You can get these greasers out on nine pitches," was the way that Stanley put it, which was the way he put everything, as raspy and brusque as a horned toad on the outside and a soup of affection within. We were sitting out the top of the ninth with a comfortable lead. At our backs were rusted railroad tracks and down the tracks was a

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loading platform with an anomalous gable-peaked roof. If those eucalyptus trees that shaded it had been oaks the scene would have been the South, boyhood.

"You know what I've got going, don't you?"

"Yeah, man, I know. You'll jinx it if you talk about it, though."

"My ass! I've never talked about them before and I've lost them all." Tradition had it that if you mentioned a no-hitter before the last out it would all come down around your ears. Even broadcasters behind foul-proof glass shut up. Baseball was a viper's nest of traditions.

"Just don't say anything to the Mexs. They believe in all that superstitious shit."

I called over Grifo, the catcher. He was ready to go in chest-protector, shin-guards and the mask tilted back on his head. The first memory I have of my father was in the same outfit, but with the mask down and a lattice-work of steel across his entrapped, terrifying face. He was an entrapped but not a terrifying man. The mask was what had terrified me, the distance it put between us, and the way it marked out his face in bars of light and gloom. he was an obliging man and that was probably the reason he was playing the monster that day and not third base, because he was a third baseman and a good one.

In this league Grifo was a good catcher and he knew the hitters. I checked out the last three with him and found my calculations correct—fastballs, curves in and out, and fast balls on the handle. Then I told Stanley where I wanted him to play each hitter in center field and Stanley snapped, "Yeah, man, yeah." Grifo had a lopsided smile and a row of long yellow teeth. "*Tranquilo,* hombre," he said. "Later we drink a little tequila, eh?"

"That's it!" I said with a nervous laugh, which is how the Mexicans said it, "*Eso es!*" the first word invariably barrel-toned and prolonged. You threw a third strike and all around the field you heard it, "Aaaa-so!" like frogs croaking over a pond. Grifo tilted back his head, raised his

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fist of a bottle and spout of a thumb over his mouth and worked his jaw. When I repeated the sign he did a rubbery little dance and giggled like a girl. Nothing quite so disarmed the Mexicans as the prospect of a gringo matching their slugs of tequila.

Juan Antonio, the third-base coach, observed our pledge with a dark curdled face of misgiving and grudging allowance. Across the diamond at the cantina reinforcements had arrived in anticipation of the final out. There must have been twenty-five there now, dressed in tight jeans, ragged open shirts and straw sombreros. The tequila was flowing and the volume was up and raucous. A mariachi band was somewhere in the vicinity and getting closer. A scratchy fiddle vied with a flatulent horn. Directly behind the plate the tassels of the eucalyptus branches hung motionless and the bark peeled off in streamers. Above the sun was hot and the sky a long ways off. Out in right that cactus fence was close enough to lasso. The air was redolent with burro piles, goat droppings and piss. Mosquitoes and flies strafed by.

Roberto, the Castilian dandy, popped up to short and the bottom of the ninth was on.

If you look for an indigenous Mexican ball game, not *futbol* imported from Spain or *beisbol* imported from the States, all you'll find are the ruins of oblong Aztec courts and some sketchy information in the library. If you examine the ruins you'll discover narrow stone rings set high on the walls on either side. In your books you'll read that the rarely-attained object of the game (the no-hitter) was to strike a small rubber ball with the hip or knee so that it passed through your designated ring. You'll read that in lieu of this the game progressed roughly like handball and was attended by the cream of the Aztec crop, who bet heavily on its outcome. You'll learn that Aztec executioner-priests, whose dress was a black monk's cowl and whose hem-length hair hung clotted with the gore of

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their victims, sometimes used the games for purposes of divination. To celestialize it they called the northern sky "the ball game of the stars." But if you keep reading you might come across the account of a Cortezian lieutenant who claimed to have witnessed a game of *tlachtli* in the provinces and who likewise claimed to have escaped the depredations that ensued only by virtue of his "most privileged person" standing (say, the President at a season opener, but don't say the Vice-President). For on this day, and for maybe the last time in Aztec-*tlachtli* history, one of the players managed to hip or knee the small rubber ball through his ring. First of all, the Spaniards had never seen rubber, so it was wonder enough that the ball bounced. But for this particular Spaniard, whose ethos was obedience, conquest and rule and whose scheme of things did not allow peasant Juan to become Pope John, wonder must have followed wonder that day. The game was stopped. Opposing players joined umpires and Aztec nobility in singing the ring-master a hymn. (Willie McCovey crooning to Joe Torre, and V.P. Hubert Humphrey quickly "opting" to do the same. Can you see it?) At this point, as the curiously portentous strains of the hymn faded away, the Spaniard, who had tried to keep on beat, must have had thoughts of a short game-ball ceremony and then more action (Henry Aaron's 715th home run, Sandy Koufax's 300th victory). The Spaniard almost certainly would have been very American in that sense. At the most, an award of a scrub-woman in place of a washing machine or a burro-train in place of a car. Maybe even a treasure sack of cocoa beans. But not what happened. No one, not Spaniard, American, or the Greek discus-thrower's own doting mother could have foreseen that end. (A slightly obsessed pitcher three outs away from a no-hitter might have dreamed it but then pitchers live remote form this world of measures and disposal). The Aztec world erupted. Opposing players and the victor charged the crowd. Maybe the subs guarded the exits. The greased pigs among the

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anointed Aztecs got clubbed and stripped by the players. The more docile or resigned were just stripped and the worth of their stuff debated. Women if they came were treated with exemplary impartiality. The players took their time. If any of the spectators jumped onto the court in hopes of escape they later provided grim comic-relief for their bare-assed brethren. The Spaniard must have feared for his cod-piece. Certainly he feared for the divine order of things. What within his or ancestral memory could equal this Revolt of the Jocks and worse yet, the submission or hapless squirming of their superiors? Chaos. The umpires were the last to be stripped. They were. Then with the court cleared the victor's erstwhile opponents heaped up the loot. The victor doled out a bauble to each. The crowd was signaled to its feet, made to applaud and resing the hymn. They sang it till they got it right and the victor was music-master and judge. Then he waved them out. One wonders about the traffic jam, the new look at the corner bars, the goldstrike prices for serapes and banana leaves outside the stadium. Inside, the Spaniard is left looking at a mountain of riches, a strange little animistic ball and a stone ring. He concludes on a tough swallow that the winner in the ring game was entitled to the clothes and portable property of all the spectators and the other players were bound by dubious law to catch the sports-lovers and to pile it all at his feet.

The point being that if I got past the next three hitters I was more than willing to accommodate myself to the customs of the land.

The further point being that although the portable property and the clothing would be nil, all the powers and prerogatives of the Rio Loja Ringmaster would be mine.

A title not unworthy of Cooperstown. The Rio Loja Ringmaster.

Rings and zeros.

I got past two. The first, watermelon belly, waved

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loose-jointedly at two outside fast balls and then stacked up like an accordion as I broke a curve off his belt and over the inside corner of the plate. Even the umpire blinked on that one and the delayed call of strike three triggered a volley of insults mostly having to do with what was unimpeachably and not so remarkably true: that he was lit on a slow tequila burn and wanted nothing so much as to get out of the sun and into the cantina for good. From behind me came a chorus of belchy "*Eso's*" and from Perico in left his crazed cackling imitation of the whole Mexican barnyard. Stanley was good for his contemptuous appraisal of the "greaser" batsman. Behind his mask Grifo contributed a horsey grin. I bit down on a grin of my own. I was two outs away and I had been this close before. But never before had I had such a God's eye view of my efforts and certainly never before had I felt such a vast airless space within myself which could only mean that it would come to pass. As I stood with my back to the plate, rubbing up the next pitch, I looked out over the cactus, mesquite and adobe in right. Had I been standing on the mound in Collier Field and looking in the same direction I would have been looking "downtown," just where every slugger threatened to ride your best pitch. They were always going to park your fastball right in front of City Hall. They were always going to straighten out your curve all the way down Main Street. They were always calling you bush-league, rinky-dink, Jack-daddy. Well, if they hit it downtown in this park it would roll up against the brown hairy shanks of some Mexican housewife slapping tortillas out in the *campo*. And they wouldn't. Today, they weren't going to touch me. I wasn't as crassly superstitious as some ballplayers, but I had finer sense of the ironies of life than most. I had a bent toward the cosmological. I had notions of how galaxies were shifted and moons reorbited and how the sleek mercurial thread of a life was spun in harmony with some higher purpose and how that purpose might amount to no more than a beard-tweak when the mightier

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and the meaner designs in life had been accomplished. I had failed at the walls of Troy. Cortez had failed at the Courts of Spain. Cortez had won in Mexico and busted enough records to make record-keeping an over-night science. From the walls of Troy to the stricken green cactus walls of Rio Loja, from the Courts of Spain to the thatched huts of Vera Cruz, I saw it as the Ironist saw it: all of a piece. Cortez moved continents; I moved a little white ball in and out. For the Ironist Cortez' over-sized success achieved its true proportions as a paradigm for my own. Upstairs the sweepingly heroic and the mock-heroic frequently got stood on their heads. It had long been constellated: I was not to be touched. Abner Doubleday Hermano Cortez and Richard Zuetzalcoatl Dixon. They'd be singing and jiving in the streets of Tenochtitlan tonight when they heard the news.

The second took me longer. This fellow looked like a back-alley artist and had a sinewy scarred body that looked like a whetstone for a knife. He stared at me with obsidian black eyes and a jaggedly-cut moustache. His skin had been fired daily in the Mexican kiln. Two sticks of dynamite up his pants' legs would have only taken off chips. No bee could sting him. But he was a tight, spring-action swinger and the first pitch—a slow, diving curve—caught him by surprise and the bat wouldn't move. It was a called strike one. Grifo whipped the ball back. Grifo had a keen scent for tequila and it was on the air. He wanted it over. Zap! Zap! Zap! The next pitch was a sharp curve low on the outside corner and he was swinging from the heels for a fast ball. A by-the-book strike two. I decided to waste a high and tight hard one and it sailed by his eyes. He never looked at it. He kept looking at me, a black, fatalistic gleam in his eye. I looked behind me at the umpire who returned my look with no expense to his wits. I wasn't asking for genius, just enough sense and wherewithal to know which raised hand corresponded to strike and which to ball. I pawed at the mound, a raised lump of

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potato knots the summer rains had gullied. I waited for Grifo's signal. When it came he dangled two thick teat-like fingers. Another curve. That was according to our plan—get him out on curves and it was time to get him out. But a moment's hesitation gave time for something to dislodge inside. That something began to slide. What if he were looking for the curve? Wouldn't he be after that last high fast ball? The slide turned to a wave of cold spasms right up my alimentary tract. What had he hit before? Nothing hard, but always the fast ball, a pop-up, a grounder. Anything might be dangerous now. The official scorer could be trusted to disabuse a gringo of his no-hitter. Always fast balls, but he was bound to learn. Now dry, salty little grease-pops sprayed the roof of my mouth. I had to throw something soon. There was a fine line, a little kernel of difference between you controlling them and them controlling you. But even as I swung back into my windup, poised and kicked high, my fingers played over the seams or along them, fast ball or curve. When I let go the fingers were along the seams and Grifo got the curve he was asking for.

I hung it. Let me explain. A hung curve is like nothing in this world. Its real realm is mythology. It's enacted in inexorable slowmotion, with every stitch on the ball and every sparkle in the air in frozen full-view. For the pitcher, it is Achilles watching the arrow leap from Paris' bow and watching it home in on his heel and knowing there is no place deep enough, high enough, or wall-and-turreted enough where it can't come. For the batter it must be like Tantalus wearily, abjectly reaching for the fruit only to find that for once the fruit doesn't move and that he has it hard in his grasp. Yes, just that moment when the feel of the fruit, the heavy udder-weight of its juice, is enough to transform a man. For the pitcher and batter then, it is the instant that the curve hangs there and not the instant that it is consumed that is the very stuff of myth. For it does hang, and I had hung it. It comes in high, released one

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stitch on the seam too early. About ten feet in front of the batter its spin becomes sluggish and about five feet farther on it stops, or it appears to stop and swell and primp and pucker like a fat young easy lay in a carnival dance hall, smelling of dime-store cosmetic and a phoney gardenia scent, before beginning the fleshiest, the tritest, the most insultingly seductive slow easy arc right down across the letters and into home-run land. A batter who doesn't blast it invites slurs on his manhood. A pitcher who hangs it and gets away with it is marveled over like some underworld pilgrim who has made the complete circuit.

I had sulphur breathing out of each pore in my scalp but I survived. Grifo had been right. This stropped-down blade of a home run hitter had been looking for the fast ball. He had his bat out too early and instead of the big bang produced a half-swinging bunt which I fielded to the left of the mound and ran unassisted to first base, not liking the overly hospitable looks of Bariga at that moment. As I Crossed the gunny-sack which served for first base and flipped the ball onto Roberto who was backing up, two things happened: the runner who crossed behind me hissed, "*Suerte*, gringo," (or luck) and out in foul territory in right, where between the cactus fence and more adobe shacks a dirt road led onto the field, I saw the outrageously out-of-place grill of a long black limousine nose into view. Running in that direction I would be the first on the field to see it. Maybe better than the Mexicans I knew what it meant. The occupants of the car, dark-suited and wearing the felt hats of the Hollywood Forties, saw me running towards them. The car stopped, invisible to the cantina drinkers. I stopped. They remained inside, two in front and one in back, behind a windshield plumed with cigarette smoke. I turned back to the field. The lefty was stepping into the batter's box, Stanley who could see the car was glowering at it from center field. I got to the first base line, vaguely conscious of the drunken gabble of the tequila drinkers, the pep-talk from my teammates, and

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looking from the lefty to Stanley. I didn't dare look behind me. When I got to the mound I could see if they were in the car or out of it from the corner of my eye. If they were out of it I supposed I had better be gone. I could get down those tracks and stay off the highways and they'd never catch me. I'd never pitch the no-hitter either. But then who knew how these federales' minds operated? Maybe they wanted me to sweat it out. Maybe they wanted to light up a joint of their own. Maybe, not knowing I was on the verge of becoming Rio Loja Ringmaster and thereby gaining, among the many honors, surely the paltry, prosaic one of federale immunity, maybe they would give me time to throw three pitches and three would be enough. Stanley thought not. Stanley was not so much a nay-sayer as a renowned straight-speaker, an unmincing Kent to the Mexicans' superserviceable rogues. In his growling, embattled voice he shouted in from center field, "You better get out of here, man! I got a Mexican wife!" A Mexican wife did entitle you to something like federale immunity, at least when the federales got their quota and drew up the list of gringos they would deport for any given month, they passed over tortilla-winners for half-Mexican mouths. Stanley was safe. He had weathered more than one bust, seen more than one friend driven up and dumped at the border. During the big bust of a year ago, when Lester King himself outraced the federales to the Rio Grande and I was being eulogized with such corny headlines as "The Ice-man Cometh" for my World Series' heroics, Stanley was the only hairy gringo to walk across the central plaza in daylight or otherwise, a feat still talked about. He was known by those who stuck around long enough to know when the heat was on. It was on now or at least the pilot light was burning.

But the lefty was in the batter's box and Grifo was pounding his mitt. I got up on the mound, in conspicuous full-view. The federales were still in their car and the car was still out of everybody's sight at the cantina, which was

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important for when the drunks had a look all hell would break loose. And luckily, at that moment, a three-piece mariachi band stumbled up the tracks and in under the eucalyptus tree, taking the attention. Of the players only Stanley seemed to have seen the car. He shouted again, "I'm not shitting you, man!" The English brought on the customary Mexican guffaws. I felt sweat in a cold band along my hairline and prickling under my arms. My palms were wet. I got the ball from Juan, the third-baseman, and I either had to throw to the lefty or throw it sky-high and bolt. I checked the car again. They were still in it but fidgety. I drew an imaginary line fifteen feet out from the foul line that they would have to cross before the choice was taken from me. They couldn't catch me, I knew. With so many kids, women, burros, goats, dogs and reeling merry-makers around I didn't think they would shoot. Until they crossed that line it was as if they didn't exist. But they did. They existed to the point that this no-hitter joined all the others in a cavalcade of cruel, last-pitch misses. I suddenly felt immeasurably tired, spent. My knees began to shake. I reread the auguries. It was decreed —I was to lose it and to carry the thought of it like a fresh nodule on my tumor that I could have gotten it had the events not so conspired. I was due a long, convalescent ride to the border. I would be left to look for another burro league. I had a twilit flash of myself wandering the Texas banks of the Rio Grande looking for seventeen *muchachos* who would let a goose-necked old-timer into their game. Kids made use of me, took advantage of my madman's lust to play. Impishly, they made me work my way up to the mound. They stuck me with the cactus and the grave-digger out in right field. No! The most categorical Big-League NO I could scream! Not even Icarus had taken such a nose-dive! If I couldn't get it now I would give it up for good! Surely as a reasonably enlightened thirty year old member of the 20th century I could be expected to lay the ghost of baseball to rest when the ghoul-collectors wanted

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their due. Let the three in that big black hearse come when I had finished what I had come to Rio Loja and into this world to do.

My fear of the federales turned to anger and defiance. My exhaustion flamed out and roared. Stanley could whistle his tune out in center field, right now I could blow that ball past the whole murderous Yankee row. Stanley whistled, "You fucking crazy, man!" Crazy as your paintings, Stanley! Crazy as Perico, the orchidmaster! I took a fast-ball sign. Crazy, Stanley, Lester, and angry. Wrathful. Federale wrath. Women wrath, Lorraine. The little extra, Lorraine, I could have burned into your belly had I wanted to reach back. I reached back so far that I dragged the bottom of thirty far too gentlemanly years and I threw. I had it all on that ball. It blazed an incandescent trail into Grifo's mitt where it plunged into the sea with a molten, suction-like roar. Strike one. The little lefty never saw it. He must have felt it singe the baby-hair off his face. He might have heard the on-rush of air as a malefic visitation. But he didn't know where it had come from and what made it the demon it was. His bat never moved. Grifo, lax and impressionable to begin with, looked dumb-struck. It was all he could do to fish it out of his mitt and throw it back. There was a stunned quiet from the fielders then expressions of awe. The cantina drinkers caught the shudder of something momentous in the air and froze in various drunken positions. The mariachi scratched on like rats behind a wall and then stopped. Rio Loja had never seen such a fast ball. If Quetzalcoatl were to be believed in this village he had arrived.

But Stanley, unmythic, un-priest-poisoned Stanley, raised the alarm and began running in from center field, "Here they come! They're out of the car, man!" "Get back!" I shouted and threw again. It was a second strike, thrown with more abandon and more fire than the first. The lefty and Grifo were still in the throes of the first—automatized. There was a statuary stillness at the plate.

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Stanley was yelling somewhere close to second base. Then came the first whoops of deliverance from the drunks. I looked at my line I had drawn. They were across it, three preposterous Mexican federales dressed in black with hats pulled down over their ruddy-brown, jowly faces and huffing like Mac Sennett cops. It was a grab-bag dream, garbage humor from the pit storming a stage of high moment. They bumped and stumbled against each other, they were tall, medium and short, blunderbuses to a man. Predictably they got disoriented at the Rio Loja bench and performed enough high-jinks that the cantina drunks began to heckle and laugh. I couldn't believe it. Stanley assured me it was real. "They'll crucify you!" I recalled my no-hitter like a nugget of pure gold sinking beneath all this alchemized muck. I shouted to Grifo for the ball. Grifo had his mask back and a drop-jawed, simpleton's gape on his face, like a kid in a whorehouse. He had the ball in his hand. He was turned toward the Rio Loja bench, as was practically everyone else on the field. Only Stanley who was charging up behind me and the lefty who stood with his bat cocked in the box were missing the show. It was too late. The lefty wanted to hit—he looked like he would stake his baby sister's virginity on the next pitch—but Grifo had the ball and the federales were about to get untracked and onto the field. The cantina drunks gave me a moment to get my neck in the noose by pressing up from behind and offering the federales swigs from their bottles. Bill Veeck, everybody's impresario, couldn't have staged it more to the drunk's liking. One federale, the short fat runty one, did indeed take a swig and promptly returned to action and collided with his superior, who took another moment to dress him down. The third of their group, somewhat too stylishly, I thought, scanned the field until he found me and started around the bench only to be intercepted by a particularly jubilant fan who wouldn't take no for an answer. The Mexicans and their bottles. The next best thing to getting a gringo drunk was to leave three

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federales for dead.

By that time Stanley had arrived at the mound, furious. "They don't give a shit who you are! They'll do a job on you!"

"I'm nobody," I said, shaking him off, "if I don't throw this last pitch!"

"Shove your no-hitter, man!"

I shouted at Grifo again, but he was too entertained by the spectacle of three federale buzzards being swarmed under by the jays. It probably never occurred to him that they had come to take his star battery-mate. I shouted at the lefty for the ball, "*La pelota*!" and again, "*Cojela, tonto*!" That "*tonto*" (stupid) revved him up to the breakaway. He grabbed the ball out of Grifo's mitt and burned it out to me just as one federale came over the top and two around the ends of the bench. Stanley observed laconically, "You're fucked," and the lefty, who had conniving, infantile good looks and little respect for his elders, jeered, "*Galina*!" (which meant nothing more or less provocative than "chicken"). He didn't deserve it but I had no choice. There was no time for a signal, no time for a windup, no time for all the grace, speed and unerringness I had always dreamed into that last pitch. No time for the beautiful, vainglorious last flash of light, the shudder of bat-driven air, and the final kettle-drum impact of the ball in the catcher's mitt. Eight and two-thirds innings pitched flawlessly over the keyboard and no time for the consummating last chord. *Immortalitas interruptus*. The federales were where I had fielded that last swinging bunt. They wore big, baked, ferocious faces for the occasion. They strode mightily down the shaft of the public eye. Instead of the imprint of my last pitch to savor toward sleep I would gag on the sight of these three black-clad, thug-faced defenders of the public weal and spoil-sports of imperialistic no-hitters. My no-hitter. The ball game of the stars. I told Stanley, "At Frog's," and I told the lefty, "*Toma, niño*!" (Take this, squirt!) as I threw him a looper

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that if he didn't hit I didn't want to know about. I knew that he hit it, however, because as I neared third base I heard a hefty crack of the bat and as I reached the tracks I knew where it had gone. David, the gravedigger, whom no one but the corpses had thought to credit, had made his *ultimo esfuerzo* and now was yipping like a dog with analgesic heat rubbed on its privates (that's another story in another league) and picking cactus needles out of his flesh. The lefty had hit it downtown Rio Loja.

I wouldn't have had it any other way.

I only wish that Juan Antonio, the Frog, had not called after me so jiltedly as I put spikes between sleepers and got down the tracks. More than symbolically I had tossed him my glove. He knew we wouldn't be apart for long.

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*Rush Rankin*

## POEM

Its intentions are clear as the air in a bee hive.
It is not a surrogate for a kind of absence.
It declares itself like a finger. Cicero
would have kept this poem in a leather pouch
and carried it on his back as he fled the city.

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*Albert Stainton*

## THE LIMESTONE STATUE BOXING FACTORY

started from unpretentious beginnings
and hasn't, in fact, come very far along –
still occupies the back wall of the bedroom,
but the personalized care that often
characterizes such one-man operations
makes the prospects infinite, because
this particular type of limestone
disintegrates if not given the most exacting
hourly care. The statues must be stored
in orangewood crates, and though the crates
may be shoddily tacked together, no other
type of wood will do. The boxes must
be kept constantly in rotation, moved
not just once or twice a day, but constantly,
the top row placed on the bottom,
the bottom on top, the box in the left
floor corner shifted to the ceiling
on the right, and so on.
Even more important, the boxes must be
pried open every day, and sprinkled with
a watering can, the head of which must have
ninety fine-gauge holes. This sprinkling
is perhaps the most important part, the
manager explained, as he opened the crates
and exposed the vulnerable statues – white,
rough as if made of sand-grains
imperfectly held together, dwarfs
embarrassed by their nakedness, lovers
clutching, afraid of cracking apart,

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stunted heroes staring blank-eyed down
at the tiny greyhounds coiling around
their ankles. There is little prospect,
he reluctantly admitted, that these statues
will ever be shipped anywhere, so that
the entire enterprise seems to be profitless.
The absolute necessity of continuing it,
however, remains unquestioned.

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# *Two Poems by Naomi Lazard*

## PUBLIC NOTICE

This ramp is not a pedestrian walk.
Violators will be disciplined.
This ramp is the fruit
of intense research, designed
only for special vehicles.
Nothing and no one with legs
is permitted here for any reason
whatsoever. The impact caused by feet,
especially in shoes, would be disastrous
to its performance. Disciplinary
action will be prompt and severe.
Offenders will be prosecuted
without regard for age or sex.
This ramp is one of several
in an experimental project,
the first of their kind anywhere.
It has been given the Better Government
seal of approval. We expect
that in the very near future
many more of them will be installed.
Orders for them are coming in
at a rate we honestly did not hope for.
The vehicles for them
are scheduled for production.
Plants have been requisitioned
and are being converted to that purpose.
This project will go forward
as quickly as possible.
We are doing our best to fill orders
for both ramps and vehicles
as fast as they come in.

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# THE CITATION

We are happy to inform you
that your achievement is recognized.
After having pursued this matter
for so long, after such hardships
as you have borne, you must be pleased
by the outcome. We are overjoyed
for you. It is our pleasant duty
on this occasion
to strike the medallion
commemorating your success.
It will, we hope, be everything
you ever wanted in a medallion.
Its value, of course, is not
in the materials it is made of,
but in its meaning,
a tribute to your merit.
We hope you will consider it
a work of art as well, remembering
the awesome amount of work
that has gone into it
despite its small size.
We hope you will be proud of it
as we are proud to bestow it on you.
We would also like to offer you
our wholehearted support
on your future endeavors.
You obviously richly deserve it.

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Addenda: The medallion you receive
must never be shown nor worn.
Our correspondence closes
with this letter.

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# *Two Poems by Erica Jong*

## BECOMING A NUN

On cold days
it is easy to be reasonable,
to button the mouth against kisses,
dust the breasts
with talcum powder
& forget
the red pulp meat
of the heart.

On those days
it beats
like a digital clock –
not a beat at all
but a steady whirring
chilly as green neon,
luminous as numerals in the dark,
cool as electricity.

& I think:
I can live without it all –
love with its blood pump,
sex with its messy hungers,
men with their peacock strutting,
their silly sexual baggage,
their wet tongues in my ear
& their words like little sugar suckers
with sour centers.

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On such days
I am zipped in my body suit,
I am wearing seven league red suede boots,
I am marching over the cobblestones
as if they were the heads of men,

& I am happy
as a seven-year-old virgin
holding Daddy's hand.

Don't touch.
Don't try to tempt me with your ripe persimmons.
Don't threaten me with your volcano.
The sky is clearer when I'm not in heat,
& the poems
are colder.

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# WRINKLES

*for Naomi Lazard*
"Sometimes I can't wait until I look
like Nadezhda Mandelstam."
– Naomi Lazard

My friends are tired.
The ones who are married are tired
of being married.
The ones who are single are tired
of being single.

They look at their wrinkles.
The ones who are single attribute their wrinkles
to being single.
The ones who are married attribute their wrinkles
to being married.

They have very few wrinkles.
Even taken together,
they have very few wrinkles.
But I cannot persuade them
to look at their wrinkles
collectively.
& I cannot persuade them that being married
or being single
has nothing to do with wrinkles.

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Each one sees a deep & bitter groove,
a San Andreas fault across her forehead.
"It is only a matter of time
before the earthquake."
They trade the names of plastic surgeons
like recipes.

My friends are tired.
The ones who have children are tired
of having children.
The ones who are childless are tired
of being childless.

They love their wrinkles.
If only their wrinkles were deeper
they could hide.

Sometimes I think
(but do not dare to tell them)
that when the face is left alone to dig its grave,
the soul is grateful
& rolls in.

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# *Three Poems by Louis Simpson*

## THE MANNEQUINS

Whenever I passed Saks Fifth Avenue
I would stop at a certain window.
They didn't acknowledge my presence – they just stared.

He was sitting in his favorite chair,
smoking a pipe and reading a best-seller.
She was standing in front of an easel.

She was finding it easy to paint
by filling in the numbered spaces
with colors. $5.98.

The artificial logs glowed in the fireplace.
Soon it would be Christmas. Santa would come down
the chimney,
and they'd give each other presents.

She would give him skis and cufflinks.
He would give her a watch with its works exposed,
and a fur coat, and perfume.

Though I knew it was "neurasthenic"
I couldn't help listening to the words
that they said without moving their lips.

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## NEWSPAPER NIGHTS

After midnight when the presses were rolling
we would leave the *Herald Tribune* building
and walk up to Times Square.
The three of us would still be laughing and joking.

I can see a sign that says Schenley.
There are numbers high on a building
telling the time, 12:27,
the temperature, 36.

We have the streets all to ourselves.
There is only the sound of an ambulance or a fire.
There are only the lights that still keep changing
from green to red and back to green in silence.

## FLORIDA

A balloon drifting in a pool,
swivelling when the wind changes . . .

It tugs, trying to lift,
but is held by the wet string.

All through the afternoon it drifts
from one side of the pool to the other.

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David Shaber

# Progress Report

It was, inevitably, his mother who told him.

Even in his generation of late-marriers, of self-made orphans affiliated with nothing but each other, forgetters of birthday cards and Confirmation gifts who took no delight in cousins and nephews and felt families only as weight, there were certain debts to be paid. One was to his mother and father on their semi-annual visits to New York and the three-and-a-half-room apartment where Ira and his wife bumped cautiously together, the same apartment he had when he was single and in which they maintained for each other the illusion that they still led separate lives.

And at least once every visit it would happen, the session with his mother. Most of the time spent in restaurants of measured luxury (chopped chicken liver or cherrystone clams, shrimp cocktail fifty cents extra) until the litter of lobster shells lay cracked and sucked and picked clean like the small talk between them, or staring with unfocussed eyes over each other's shoulders in the lobbies of whatever

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musicals had run long enough to put tickets within reach of what Ira called his Connections, later to wander the streets sucking mints to dissolve the sweet after-web of cherry cheesecake, wondering what shopping trips to plan next until three or four days were up and his parents could go back to Cleveland again. But no matter what they found to do, sooner or later on every trip there would be that sudden slack moment when his father was out testing the truth of the cross-town buses (the sound of taxi-meters was to him the click of eternity) and his wife had retreated to the kitchen to prepare the visit's one obligatory dinner at home, trying not to hear the sounds his mother made in the bedroom, *their* bedroom. (His wife viewed his mother narrowly, and from afar, and expressed her feelings about the visit in her cooking, squeezing and beating and whipping; when his parents were there she and Ira were obliged to sleep on the sofa-bed in the open living room so there was no private conversation between them. But he knew, he knew; and rancor would cover the brisket like gravy.) And so she would disappear into the kitchen and Ira would be left alone in the living room at his mother's mercy for her inevitable report from home.

For this was when she offered him the real gift she bore each time across the Alleghenies preserved from the Pennsylvania vapors in the air-conditioned Buick, scraps and shreds of bad news about those Ira had gone to college with, to high school with and even, once or twice, ridden his tricycle with. She spoke as though he still lived in Cleveland and knew the addresses on all the streets, as though he were still building his life around which night of the week-end he could finagle the car, instead of spending them all with a blondish stranger in three-and-a-half rent-controlled rooms on the west side of an island five hundred miles away. (Or five hundred thirty-six-point-six miles, to be exact, if you took the turnpike and the Lincoln Tunnel, Ira once having clocked it precisely. Door to door.) He didn't care about any of it, of course, but it did

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pass the time. And it was better at that than those arguments they called discussions in which again and again he tried to explain to her that this was only temporary, as soon as he really got started in the theatre everything would be different, or the reason he and his friends smiled that way when they happened to mention their hometowns; or why when he got married he had simply added his wife's name, which happened to be Frances, below his own on the bell (and did not mention that she had already been living there five months at the time), why they had simply moved her furniture in and now four years later still knew which was hers and which his. There was no way to make his mother understand, for instance, that they simply were different from the people she knew back in Cleveland, and that merely because they were married they saw no reason to change their lives. And so he would lie there each time saying mechanically "No kidding" and "*Who?*" and "How about that," chuckles without mirth and head-shakings without wonder, while she ran through her usual collection of blemishes and disasters. It was Saturday afternoon this time that the moment came, a bucolic scene: his mother in the bedroom getting out of her downtown clothes, back early from the lower east side and the search for handbags, wholesale, and his wife in the kitchen clacking the pots and pans like castanets, leaving Ira lying in state on the sofa, the copy of *The Partisan Review* he held but did not read clasped like a shield across his breast. And eventually his mother wandered in from the bedroom like Fate with her hair net on to restore the wave for the theatre that night, picked up her *McCall's*, settled herself in the Danish captain's chair, the last folds of her house coat expiring slowly about her, the descent of the Gods, Athena in pink nylon, and began.

The family first, the shriveled edges of the childhood dream reduced now to which uncle spends too much and which too little and how his brother-in-law's children may seem secure but you can tell. Next the pinochle pillars, the

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life and times of the old Mah-jong–canasta group in a changing world: how Bessie and Hy are so bereft that Merna had to move away when her husband was transferred to Milwaukee, Bessie drives by the house each night just to look, and when his teen-age bride said yes Freda's thirty-five year-old Melvin cried even though she has a cast in one eye, it's the left but you can only tell when she looks straight at you. Then on to his classmates, which couple lost their little girl and who was so brave when she had the hydrocephalic though they think there's this new operation; who he wouldn't recognize, who surprised everyone and who the joke was on when he caught her, plus who was operated on for cataracts and who was in traction, slipped discs and divorces, catastrophes natural and man-made, and each one bearing a name. Audrey and Roslyn (you remember Rozzy), Arlene, Marlene and Renée, Jaffe and Schreiber, Stockfish, Spero, Klausner and Kahn, Ira remembering only that certain syllables went together but not always the face with them, like an emigrant hearing the tongue he had spoken as a child and knowing how it should sound but no longer the meaning. And thus on that Saturday in the course of her standard roll call of woe from that lost world once circumscribed by his high school homeroom, his mother happened to mention the news about Rhoda and Hodgkin's Disease.

" – What is it?" she asked then.

"Nothing," he answered.

And it was nothing really. (There was just that moment when the color in his face changed and he arched his back up from the sofa slightly and paused, suspended, eyes staring straight up. Just that moment while outside on Columbus Avenue the wind made a sound like the rustle of drying leaves, and somewhere a bus ground away from a stop, and in the kitchen he could hear the slices of potato dropping from his wife's hand into a pan, one, two. Then he felt something settle beneath his throat and he sank back again. Just a slight stiffening of the back, that was

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really all there was to it.)

"Hodgkin's, did you say?"

"From the clear blue sky, just like that. Of course it's simply tragic of course."

"Mmmm."

"Why – something?"

"No, I just wondered."

"Well, it was Hodgkin's. From the clear blue sky."

"I just wondered, was all."

For if Rhoda the Last Resort Weintraub had died, what was that to him? Really.

It was not as if Ira had not known death before, even in those ageless school days. There was Ron Millman, snatched from a regular Jewish Mother's orgasm of a future, first-in-his-class internship and all, by a whipsawing Volkswagen and whatever impulse (same mother? same orgasm?) had prompted him to do eighty on the Pennsylvania Turnpike in the rain. And before him even, Bernie Boettcher, taken off high-foreheaded and brilliant at Harvard, victim of some mysterious Massachusetts meningitis, though maybe that was the price he paid for going to the Ivy League in the first place while Ira and the rest of his friends in that narrow age measured their academic ambitions largely by A-E-Phi or Phi Sig and Zebe at Ohio State, Indiana and the other Midwestern pleasure domes. And what about little Marilyn Osher, who though not beautiful or even really cute was at least popular but dead anyway; the kidneys, just somehow the kidneys, that was all anyone ever heard and after one Monday she never took her seat in English VI again. Not to mention Joe Bialow and his heart attack while bowling, though that was later, his mother had to send him the clipping in New York, or Tudy Green who shrank and shrank until she disappeared altogether, and the little kid, June What's-her-name, up the street – all of whom mattered more than Rhoda, who mattered not at all.

In the first place, Ira had barely known her. And what

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tenuous threads were there left now to draw him back? A high school yearbook that for some reason he would glance through from time to time while Frances looked over his shoulder, shaking her head and saying "God. . .oh, God" or "Oh God, just God" and shaking her head again. Thick with New York dust, it was ranked against the wall together with his college papers, the spiral notebooks and pressboard covers from a day when he thought he could protect his flanks by double-copying his Western Civ. and sociology notes and keeping them in immaculate binders with hand-printed titles (he had a way of doing his letters so they all came out the same height). Plus one or two things he didn't even know he had anymore, a dance program, a composite photograph of his Confirmation class from Temple—cameos of bland fifteen year-old faces, pasty, puffy-smooth, counted out on the creamy paper like so many gumdrops and Rhoda jellied there among the rest. Beyond these there was only the vaguest picture now of certain streets that passed for grandeur in those first heady post-war days of brick-veneer, knotty-pine luxury, den optional, Book-of-the-Month shelves and leather sofas and the first paneled basements like dungeons called recreation rooms on streets with names like English clubs, Dysart, Charney, Fenwick. And somewhere on one of them the Weintraub's house, whitewashed brick, a center hall, wall-to-wall braodloom within continued in sidewalk-to-sidewalk creeping bent without. But that was all; after the grass and carpeting and cindered streets the only thing that could call him back to her was the memory of his laughter.

After all, Rhoda. Oh Rhoda, aptly named The Last Resort Weintraub! And what else could she be, built as she was, nay, engineered, hippy and fat, a thick-toed marvel with that head rising above those hulking shoulders moon-faced and inflated, a balloon girl with puffed-up porky cheeks and overblown sausagey lips, capped by a helmet-line of dark bangs hammered rigidly across her forehead.

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She was the kind of a high school girl who made you shake your head when you saw her on the street, from the fat-knuckled fingers right down to the beefy legs that ended incredibly in angora socks which wreathed her ankles in huge woolly bushes. For her parents always draped her in the tenderest goods, cashmere and angora and lamb's wool, in hopes of softening the outline and spreading the word that she was a girl. But her voice didn't do much for the cause, that gravelly way she had of saying "shooo-er" instead of sure, in some chronically hopeful invitation to laugh. Her mirth itself was a mechanical marvel, all jiggles without, ominous rumblings, pneumatic within. Each time she laughed she choked a little, her problem was air supply; and her shoulders would heave while she got up pressure, then finally let go that bellows laugh of hers, a half-belch, half-horse-bray in and out for any and no reason, always laughing too hard at things that weren't funny at all, manufacturing the jokes and gaiety her life could not provide.

And between classes in school she would rush up to two or three others of her crowd—if that desperate collection of beasts and other hopeless cases like herself could be called a crowd—would rush up to them, shoulders heaving with that great braying burp of a laugh, and say, "So when Mr. Borz is handing back the papers, see, there is my trig book which I HAPpened to leave in the aisle, see, and of COURSE he practically trips and falls PRACtically right in my lap, and I said 'THAT'S all right, Mr. Borz, drop in ANYtime!' " And the girls would howl Oh Rhoda, come on, Rho-DA, and one of them like Ellen Breitbart—a gem herself—would repeat, "In your lap? In your LAP, Rhod?" (which rhymed with toad), and Rhoda would say shooo-er and her shoulders would shake again, the pathetic idea being to advertise how much fun they all had together. And all of them would stand there in a conspicuous corner of the hall laughing like celebrities. Oh Rhod, oh Rhod.

If there was any joke, of course, it was the girls them-

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selves. Together they constituted one of the ten lost tribes, the lowest of the low—not just beasts, but beasts who did not put out. Needless to say, no one dated them, their weekends were a mystery: Fridays they had their second-rate sorority and the next afternoon one or two of them might surface for a couple of hours at the library, but what did they do on Saturday night? No one knew, least of all Ira, who was having his own troubles with the weekends himself. For those were the days when he was pursuing royalty, and if he passed Rhoda and her woeful little band in the hall he might give them a blank look, but no more. He had no eyes or anything else for last resorts at the time, and there certainly had been nothing between the two of them. Well, almost nothing.

For though he saw himself as cut out for better things, the Better Things (Renee Sondheim, Marlene Goldhammer and the other licks of his French Vanilla dreams) saw themselves with Ronnie Nash or Mark Meisel, square-headed, camel-haired sons of privilege who drove eight-cylinder automobiles and whose smooth faces Ira hated along with their haberdasher wholesale appliance fathers. And so there was, unfortunately, another kind of girl he ended up with on occasion. Sometimes it was Iris Bloom with a face like a ferret and sometimes Ellen Breitbart who wore her rimless glasses low and her bust the same, and once anyway, despite himself, it had been Rhoda. Though by now, of course, lying on a sofa in New York while his mother's voice went on, he no longer remembered it; he no longer remembered there once had been a night when he lost his innocense—or anyway a part of it—to Rhoda Weintraub.

Not that he was all that innocent at the time. He knew what was supposed to happen between girls and boys, what incredible things girls were supposed to let boys do to them. He was no babe, no lily lamb of God; when it came to girls his life had been not so much sheltered as simply unsuccessful. And he was versed in all the folklore,

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season by season. He had sat in the front seat coming home from the football games on the fall nights with his eyes on the road ahead and his ears full of the sudden stirs and rich silences from the back seat. He had clutched his borrowed draft card and smacked his lips over three-two beer while debating with the best of them as to what might or might not be happening in the winter night behind the steamed windshields in the Cedar-Lee Theatre parking lot. And finally, he had stood with the hungry eye—O had he not!—and watched the operators saunter out of the summer-resort dance halls with their new-found playmates and known what they were going to do, then seen them wandering home smeared with lipstick after they had done it. Or claimed to.

Because while normally in that age he would believe anything anybody told him, at least at first, and the boys would gather around him at the dance while one of them announced that some sacred cashmere peach was being defuzzed even then in the boys' cloak room, then would jeer wildly when he cried, "Now? You mean right now?" the words torn out of him in anguish before he could stop himself because he always bit at first, always; still, it never lasted. No matter how the lover-boys would groan and wipe their mouths and scream bare titty, still after a few hours or days when the pain wore off there was always that residue of doubt he could not get rid of, itching like a scale at the back of his mind. Because surely after such an unnatural act the participants would no longer look the same, something would surely show on their faces. But the next time he saw them that is just how they did look, the same, especially the girls, sucking on their bottles in the cafeteria like Mother's milk, no mark on their faces, nothing, the same goo-goo smile when they passed in the hall, the same sweet voice when they handed in their homework, and in the end he could not in his innocence bring himself to believe it had ever really happened at all. And he was still waiting to find out for sure one way or the

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other that afternoon when Rhoda somehow had him cornered in the front hall and before he could escape was asking him to go with her to her next sorority affair, which happened to be a hay-ride. Whoever was having nothing to do with him at the time must have already turned him down for the weekend. Because after looking around to make sure no one had overheard, he accepted.

They were all called affairs, the parties in those days, and there were two kinds: the open ones, to which anyone could come and which were invariably the same dance in rented cellars where couples rose and fell in the semi-dark like the rhythm of their own quirky libidos, ninety cents date, seventy-five stag. The boys in sweaters and white shirts open at the neck, the girls with one hand delicately pressed at their thighs to keep their pleated skirts decent when they swung wide on the fast numbers, and leaning back to present a pelvis for the boys to revolve on during the slow ones, the girls with their killer faces and milky feet in loafers with bright pennies in the slots or in suede side-ties called Murray Benders, and higher-heeled dances at Christmas. But there were private affairs, too, for the membership only, which were mostly dinner dances and beach parties, picnics on Memorial Day—and the inevitable hay-rides. Those poor, pathetic hay-rides, in some something or other of the Ohio past, for which sons and daughters of dentists and dry cleaners arrived in their fathers' Pontiac Torpedoes and Buick Roadmasters and Chrysler Saratogas, spilling out to clamber aboard a rubber-tired rick spread with maybe four inches of hay in the good places and the floor-boards showing through in the others, then to be dragged for an hour or two, O pioneers, around one of the metropolitan parks.

The specific edges of that evening—how it began and ended, who drove and where they ate—Ira had long since forgotten, except that it was the time of something called a dude-burger-to-take-out, dry hamburgers and limp French fries in a white bakery box and the taste of a salty

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grease like aphrodisiac. But he could no longer recall that fall night smelling faintly of *Chanel* and shampoo, and the girls in blue jeans and buffalo plaid shirts crowned with the contradiction of gleaming hair to shoulders, taken down fresh-minted only an hour before from pins and curlers. Nor the feeling of ceremony as the couples assembled, one or two fathers embarrassing their daughters to death by wishing them joy while they milled around with the left-footed feeling of waiting for the evening to begin, and the sinking feeling that it already had. Until at last the fathers were driven away, there was a lurch, a scream, and in a spasm of resolute hysteria they were off.

At first Ira had hung back, looking cautiously around with a pink plastic smile fixed on his face to see if anyone else who knew better had also been trapped in that dismal crowd, hoping that no one who mattered was there to catch him with what he so badly wanted to be his inferiors. But trying to be inconspicuous with Rhoda was impossible, those King Kong shoulders, that Mongolian laugh. She was all over the place, in every couple's lap, hanging that melon of a head over their shoulders, sticking her face between theirs with "Awlll rrright now, let's watch it there, let's just watch it!" And naturally somewhere along the way, she let Ira have it in the face with a handful of hay. In no time they were all doing it; fistfuls came to hand and they reaped them, Rhoda in the lead, shrieking and flouncing around and scattering hay like a chubby flail, spitting chaff, getting it in her hair, her ears, up her nose. And Ira was just beginning to think the whole thing might not turn out to be so bad after all, when it began to rain. First a drizzle, then harder, then to come down in earnest and rain, really rain.

There was a blinking moment, followed by muffled groans, faint cries, rearrangements among the hay. On his knees Ira paused dumbly, hands still full of the stuff. "Here," said Rhoda. She had pulled her reversible raincoat up over her head and was holding out one side of it for

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him. He was really beginning to get wet now and the hay had gotten too soggy to throw anyway, so he gave up and got under the coat with her. They sat with it over their heads and shoulders but the rain still drove in at their sides, so they lay down to get out of the wind. The coat still only came down about halfway to their knees and their legs and feet stuck out, but it was better than nothing and for a time they were very busy, hitching around, stretching it down, tucking in the sides. Until there was nothing more to do and suddenly, absurdly, there they were alone under the coat with their faces about three inches apart, staring at each other.

"There," said Ira faintly. He did not say it to Rhoda; he just said it. "Shoo-er," she murmured, also to no one in particular. Ira could barely make out her face beneath her bangs, and for a moment in the dark there was nothing but the patter of the rain on the coat. It sounded very far away. "Here," said Ira, "Wait a sec," and found himself sliding his arm under her. She gave no sign that she had heard, and as though she didn't know anything about it her back came up a little to help him. Then he said "Wait a sec" again and shifted his weight a little closer to get his elbow under, too. They were very careful not to look at each other. And so with Ira's voice going on, sometimes saying "Here" and sometimes saying "Wait a sec" and both of them not listening or looking, like two blind and deaf unfortunates bereft of the very senses they were using (he could not believe the way she just lay there, didn't she know what he was doing?), they moved bravely together beneath the raincoat, closed their eyes and began, eventually, to kiss. He was not quite sure whose idea it was.

He was surprised first by her lips, how firm they were, how full and pleasant, and tasting faintly, sweetly of lipstick. When she did not pull away after the first kiss they continued without so much as a word, and Ira thought this surely must be what it was like, this must be how it was done. In time the rain stopped, yet still she lay with her

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lips pressed against his. Actually, that was all she did. She did not press against him anywhere else much, not in particular, anyway; nor did she kiss him with her mouth open. (That had to wait until a year or so later when it was the high point of a scabby party at Geneva-on-the-Lake, Ohio, the proper place for such things, after which Ira happily congratulated himself for going so far until in the car on the way home he realized it had been an invitation to go much further.) But what Rhoda did do was enough for Ira. Altogether they went on pressing their lips methodically together that way for the better part of an hour, which up to then was the closest he had ever been to Abandon. With a good girl. Of course she was a beast. Still he permitted himself a few candid snapshots of possible week-end nights to come, and to his surprise he found himself thinking he just might give her a call this week. He just really might.

But the real surprise came later. For when he finally lifted the raincoat from their heads a great jeer went up, everyone made shame shame with his finger and hooted happily. In dismay Ira realized that he and Rhoda had not been out of sight beneath the coat any more than a pair of ostriches in the sand, that the others had been able to see everything they had been doing, and he felt himself go weak and red there in the night. But it didn't seem to bother Rhoda. She merely sucked up a little air, belched a laugh or two, and in no time was again galumphing around in the hay, which was wet now and made a soggy sound each time she landed. And to Ira she seemed as fat as ever. Fatter. So he went home that night less innocent by this much: That you could not tell anything by how someone looked afterward. He did not ask her out again, of course. He soon began to forget it had ever happened, and thereafter when he saw her passing along the corridor in school, he merely nodded vaguely from right where he was. In the end what he remembered most vividly about the forty minutes he spent under her raincoat was how wet his feet felt where they stuck out into the rain.

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So much for the tender past, long gone and unlamented. For after the watershed of high school all that had run one way and his life another, to other streets in another city where its only visible traces now were a dusty high school yearbook and a few notebooks with all the letters even and, once in a while, an obligatory week-end in which his mother came to New York to recite the names of people who no longer meant anything to him. So if something seemed to draw Ira upwards at the word of Rhoda's fate, it certainly was no touching memory of those all-but-forgotten days. And when his mother asked him he told her it was nothing.

Because life was new names now and days with a different shape and concerns Ira felt sure no one in Cleveland ever dreamed of. In that circle of independents he recognized as his friends they acted and directed and wrote books and plays and stories and other things that mattered. They were creative people, they didn't fool around; and while they kept a watchful eye on each other for the first precipitations of real money to separate out among them, they developed long-range projects, they were nothing if not busy; they worked out careers for their wives and then adjustments to those careers, except for the one or two who were homosexual, though Ira made it a point to accept it, they all did, and those who had children or dogs didn't let them get in the way, either. They thought nothing of phoning each other after midnight, they had answering services and went away for the week-end, they took houses (for the season) where they gathered to discuss the theatre, their work and most of all, each other. All of which left no time to drive for the Red Cross, or for the Heart Association or the American Cancer Society or to join the March of Dimes. And sometimes coming home on Sunday nights from East Hampton or Fire Island (though they didn't go there much anymore, they felt it had changed) or Bucks or Mt. Snow, Ira found the pledge envelope slipped under the door and gleaming

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palely in the dark on the floor of the foyer like a rent bill to be paid, *For Multiple Sclerosis contact Mrs. Eisen 8A* or *Won't you, for Muscular Dystrophy?* but a quick scoop and it was gone into the wastebasket along with the Christmas Seals and the Easter Seals and the stamps from the TB hospital in Denver. They left that sort of thing along with the rest of the bad news to people like his mother and the others back in Cleveland and Detroit and wherever. They felt sorry for them and their shrunken, patty-cake lives, but as for themselves, they just didn't have that kind of time to waste. For they were, finally, all too busy correcting their earlier mistakes, working hard on their relationships with each other and their doctors, looking to the East (side) for the star and the resurrection. And while Ira was wondering if the fact that he had stopped biting his nails was significant in his analysis, that gland five hundred and thirty-five miles away had quietly turned traitor in Rhoda's armpit, that was all, and left her under a stone somewhere with her fat toes chubbed up for good and that bellows laugh airless once and for all. It was too bad, but it was just one of those things, it had nothing to do with him. And whatever his mother saw or thought she saw when she told him the news was no doubt nothing as well. Unless of course for a moment there on the sofa a crack opened in that ring he had forged for himself of creative friends and seven-dollar hair-cuts, of wine with dinner, sneak previews and everything else that he thought had separated him from Cleveland; and he saw precisely how much good any of it would ever do him.

But it was all right. There was only that moment, and that night when he and Frances again discussed the possibility of having children they agreed they would have them, they really would, except that the apartment was rent-controlled. And they decided once more that it would be smarter not to move.

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# *Two Poems by Thomas Johnson*

## SOPRANO

When you vanish up the staircase
Of the octaves

I know there is a window
Opening onto
A garden
Where the tern, restless
On a plum branch

Prepares to migrate
Down the blue curve

Of that vein
Deep in your neck.

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# LAMENT OF THE DRIVEN NAIL

Because of one blow
I was forced into this monogamy!
I believed
The hammer's vows,
Took that dark-headed husband
To my breast

Only to wake, widowed,
My despair holding up your houses.

How I had dreamed of the water's lips
Brushing over
The long-eared bracken,
Illumining the lovers' initials scratched
Inside the carp's bone.

Because of one blow
I have entered the celibacy
Of silence

Making sturdy the room
In which your lives
Have begun their long unravelings.

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*Molly McKaughan*

## MS. DELILAH HOFFRITZ

It begins simply with nail scissors, clipping the ends of a few hairs from the edge of his beard. Finally, after a week, he begins to notice that his beard isn't growing. Next he discovers kinky hairs on the Yves St. Laurent sheets. I am quiet and keep clipping. He thinks his hair is falling out and begins to apply expensive scalp cream every night. After sex, his snores cover the click of the scissors. Now I am using shears. His head hair, beard hair, body hair is disappearing. I collect it in paper cups. But always some snippits stick to the sheets. He rolls on them and his body itches constantly. He makes an appointment to be tested for allergies. I give him sleeping pills to stop the itching. Tonight while he sleeps peacefully, I shave him clean – armpits, legs, chest, crotch, arms, back, ass, face, head – nose hair and eye lashes clipped off at the last. My cups are overflowing. I am full of power. I open my legs and he is born again.

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# *Two Poems by W.K. Engel*

## LEG

Intolerable pain in my right leg
resisted all simple treatments
analgesics narcotics blocked nerves

decision to amputate above the knee
made most reluctantly
and only after full discussion
with other doctors and me
and with my complete understanding
(informed consent they say)
of the numerous difficulties of living
with only one leg
the severity of the pain I felt
merited operative risk and lifelong handicap

anaesthesia pentothaled out my environment
in diminishing pulsations to nothingness
my leg sticking out
through a sterile sheet lewdly
rubbed with iodine
the skin neatly circumcised all around mid-thigh
squirting bleeders snapped with hemostats
deeper cuts through muscles scapeled
pumper vessels tied oozers cooked closed
with the crackling smoking cautery
faintly smelling of burnt flesh

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the bone bared and hack-sawed through
muscle parts pulled gently over the end
to make proper underpadding for the artificial leg
skin flaps nicely matched and sewn
bandages applied sweet dreams stopped
less than an hour they took
to deleg me

half-wrapped in brown paper
my cut-off leg carried down
to autopsy morgue cold storage
and thence to the cemetery
for proper burial
(one foot in the grave –
don't tell that pedestrian joke to me)

in the recovery room my dexterous surgeon
proudly pointed out that everything
had come off well without a hitch
shuffling his feet
and hoped I would be pleased
with his success

undoubtedly the job
was neatly done I said
looking at the left side of the sheet
lying flat and footless
on the bed.

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# ROUTINE CYSTOSCOPY

The shiny new intern watching

the space probe – gleaming
stainless steel triumph of modern technology,
straighter than a corkscrew,
longer than a Parker automatic silver pencil,
thicker than a car antenna, not as long,
brilliant beacon-tipped –
slipped eleven inches
in the penis,

Clutched his own
and fainted.

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# William Wegman

## Portfolio

*William Wegman has made his idiosyncratic photographs and videotapes since 1969. He began making drawing approximately two years ago. His work evidences a continuing intrigue with twin situations, wrong ways and shaggy dog stories.*

A SHORT INTERVIEW

INT: What interests you about drawing?

WW: Drawing equipment is reliable and simple, after making videotapes and photographs. Drawing materials, like videotape, reflect their own specific natures.

INT: Do the drawings serve in any sense as exercises, for your videotapes, for instance?

WW: The drawings aren't a preamble to something else. They're not studies.

INT: What are your working habits:

WW: I make a lot of drawings at a single time, it's gearing up to the moment then a question of what to keep. You have to relax enough to let it flow—enough not to care. Matisse relaxed. Over-confidence is all it takes. I find there's a relief with the edge of the drawing—one sheet for one thought. The drawings are one-shots; I never rework.

I have a problem sustaining work over a long period. I like to finish things in a day—I don't think I ever did a project that took longer than a day to execute.

INT: I was curious about the inspiration for the theatrical drawings.

WW: They came from this interest I had in a book I've had around for awhile—a book of nineteenth century acting poses (*The Complete, The Speaker and Reciter, Based on D'el Sarte*) which showed how to display emotion in a certain set, rhetorical way. I do not really want to discuss the specific drawings.

INT: Do you anticipate any enigmas, any difficulties for someone seeing your work for the first time?

WW: Not really. They are basically friendly works—intimacy is their main characteristic. Even my mother likes them. I think you can like the drawings without asking questions and asking questions won't make you like them.

—A.A. and F.B.H.

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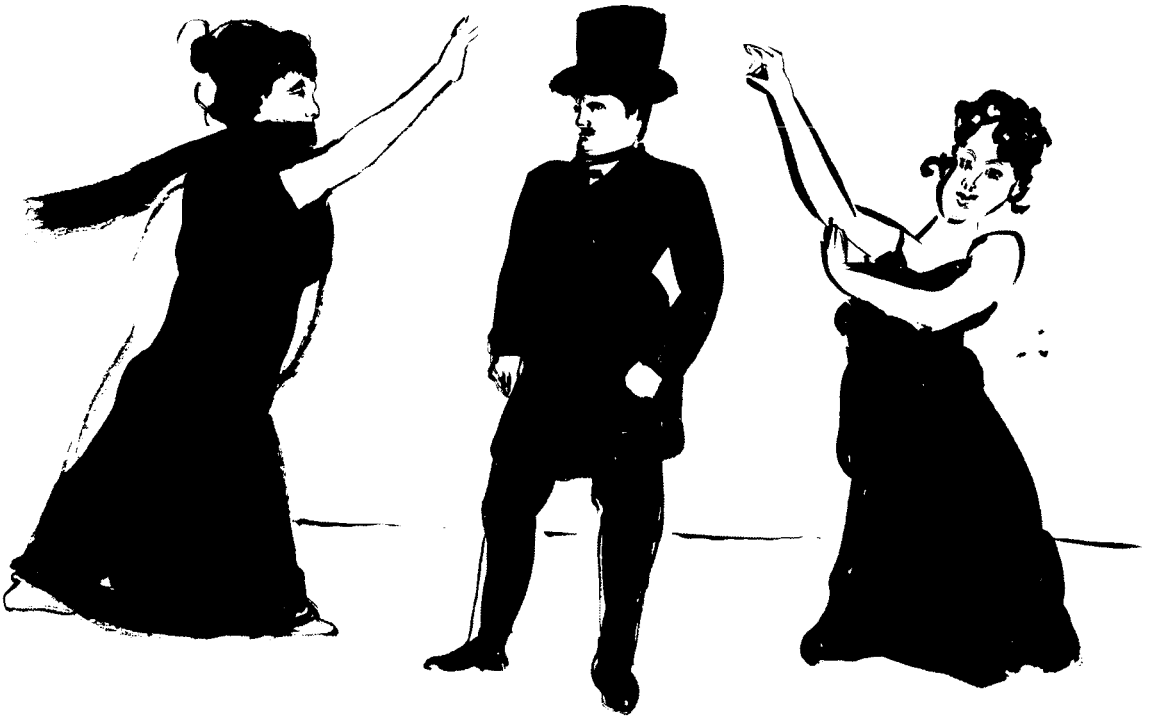

DRAMATIC HAT DANCE

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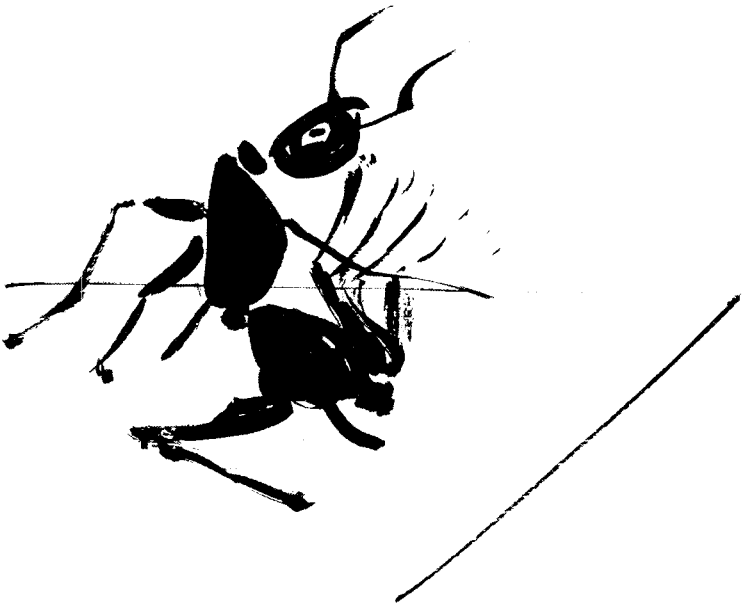

ANT WITH FLEAS

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ENTRANCE TO ONE OF THE TUNNELS IN THE SALT MINES AT WIELICZKA

ENTRANCE TO ONE OF THE CATHEDRALS IN THE CITY OF KRAKOW

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PLANTING SEEDS

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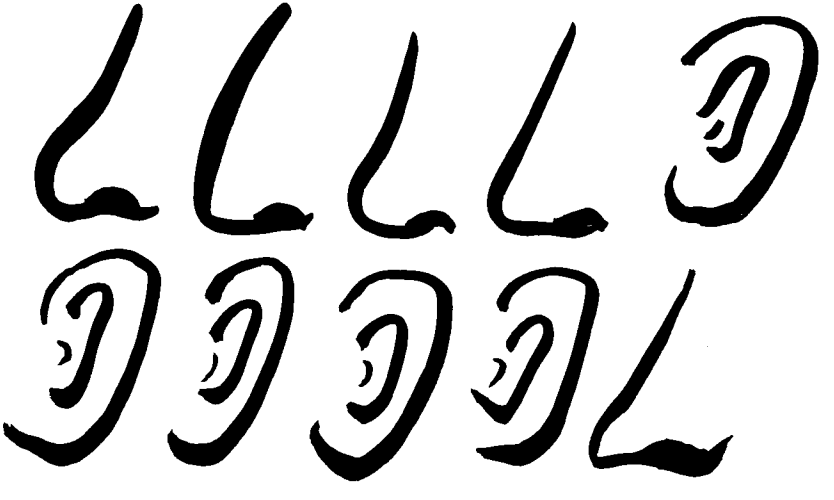

smell and sound

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# *Five Poems by Ira Sadoff*

## HOPPER'S "NIGHTHAWKS" (1942)

Imagine a town where no one walks the streets. Where the sidewalks are swept clean as ceilings and the barber pole stands still as a corpse. There is no wind. The windows on the brick buildings are boarded up with doors, and a single light shines in the all-night diner while the rest of the town sits in its shadow.

In an hour it will be daylight. In the diner the busboy counts the empty stools and looks at his reflection in the coffee urns. On the radio the announcer says the allies have won another victory. There have been few casualties. A man with a wide-brimmed hat and the woman sitting next to him are drinking coffee or tea; on the other side of the counter a stranger watches them as though he had nowhere else to focus his eyes. He wonders if perhaps they are waiting for the morning buses to arrive, if they are expecting some member of their family to bring them important news. Or perhaps they will get on the bus themselves, ask the driver where he is going, and whatever his answer they will tell him it could not be far enough.

When the buses arrive at sunrise they are empty as hospital beds — the hum of the motor is as distant as a voice coming from deep within the body. The man and woman have walked off to some dark street, while the stranger remains fixed in his chair. When he picks up the morning paper he is not surprised to read there would be no exchange of prisoners, the war could go on forever, the Cardinals would win the pennant, there would be no change in the weather.

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# SEURAT

It is a Sunday afternoon on the Grand Canal. We are watching the sailboats trying to sail along without wind. Small rowboats are making their incisions on the water, only to have the wounds seal up again soon after they pass. In the background the smoke from the factories and the smoke from the steamboats merge into tiny clouds above us then disappear. Our mothers and fathers walk arm and arm along the shore clutching tightly their umbrellas and canes. We are sitting on a blanket in the foreground, but even if someone were to have taken a photograph of us only our closest relatives would have recognized us: we seem to be burying our heads between our knees.

I remember thinking you were one of the most delicate women I had ever seen. Your bones seemed small and fragile as a rabbit's. Even so, beads of perspiration begin to form on your wrist and forehead — if we were to live long enough I'm sure we would have been amazed at how many clothes we forced ourselves to wear. At this time I had never seen you without your petticoats, and if I ever gave thought to such a possibility I would chastise myself for not offering you enough respect. I'm certain you never thought about such things, except in terms of how you might have to protect yourself.

The sun is very hot. Why is it no one complains of the heat in France? There are women doing their needlework, men reading, a man in a bowler hat smoking a pipe. The noise of the children is absorbed by the trees. The air is full of idleness, there is the faint aroma of lilies coming from somewhere. We discuss what we want for ourselves, abstractly, it seems only right on a day like this. I have

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ambitions to be a painter, and you want a small family and a cottage in the country. We make everything sound so simple because we believe everything is still possible. The small tragedies of our parents have not yet made an impression on us. We should be grateful for this, but we are too awkward to think hard about very much. I throw a scaling rock into the water; I have strong arms and before the rock sinks it seems to have nearly reached the other side. When we get up we have a sense of our own importance. We could not know, taking a step back, looking at the total picture, that we would occupy such a small corner of the canvas, and that even then we are no more than tiny clusters of dots, carefully placed so close together without touching.

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# 1928

We are sitting by the pool on a sunny day. You are wearing your white suit, holding a drink in one hand and shading your eyes from the sun with the other. Last night's party has just ended. There are splinters of broken glasses gleaming in the sunlight, chaise lounges aslant, a spray of napkins spread over the lawn. Last night we went swimming in the pool with all our clothes on, it was the night you slept with the manufacturer's wife. We never met the host. Nothing could stop the band from playing our song over and over again. All night you talked about your work, how the market would go up and up, how there was nothing to lose no matter how great the risk. The women loved you for that. A strong wind blew in from the bay, but it did not so much as ruffle your hair. The wheels of the Chrysler spun freely in a ditch.

The ugliest men fell over me. They could not keep their hands off my breasts. I could not count how many of their wives did not understand them, how many of their mistresses had not been faithful to them. I had nightmares of stillborn children and our house on the cape burning into a small pile of ash. Still, it was comforting to wake up and find you were not beside me. And it was difficult to find you in such a big house: when I walked out of our room I saw a hundred men pacing on the balustrade in long white robes. The women had let their hair down but no one seemed to notice. The rustle of their nightgowns was like the gnawing of termites.

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Now my long red dress seems too harsh against the clear blue of the pool. We do not speak, but I know you are thinking it is a shame we cannot live this way – you do not have the means and I do not have the desire. You are a little bit sad because the party is over and we have nowhere to go. The women you love are lesbians and everything you say rubs them the wrong way. The day you try to leave me I will take you for everything you have, I will let you know I never loved you, nothing you can ever do could hurt me.

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# ON MEETING ROBERT DESNOS IN MY SLEEP

We meet in a concentration camp. It is late nineteen forty-four, and the War is almost over. He takes me by the hand and reads the future in my palm. He says I will never live to see forty-eight, that I have no will left in my thumb, that my fame-line is very faint. He does not believe my wife has been faithful to me, but says that it does not really matter. When he speaks, his voice is so low it is almost inaudible; it is almost as though there were someone else speaking to me, someone who was locked in his body. When he speaks to me, the concentration camp, our fellow prisoners, even the sky which surrounds us, all seem to disappear. The pupils of his eyes are like bowls which can contain me. They frighten me more than all the Germans I imagine I have seen, so I close my eyes and manage to awaken myself. For a brief moment I am awake, looking straight up at the ceiling, which at first glance looks like a wall on its side. But Desnos will not let me go – he grabs me back into sleep by the throat. I feel the sensation of suffocation. "It is not easy to leave me," he says, "although we always try to return to the world that we know. But me, I am more at home in this world than you are when you walk into your local grocery. Only sometimes will you let your mind wander there, say when you pick up a piece of fruit and you let it, or it itself becomes the skull of a small animal. But I am this way all the time – for me, the tomato is always inside the skull of a fox."

What is so strange about Desnos is that he says he is not afraid of going crazy, of dying, or even of the Nazis who are always watching him. "The Nazis are so easy to under-

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stand," he says. "They have no inner-life. When you look into their eyes, or into the barrels of their lugers, it is always at bottom the same thing. Sometimes the German believes his gun is only an extension of his hand, the barrel his longest, most hollow finger which he may point at anyone to escape from himself."

Desnos holds seances in his cell. He makes the table rise, the bed, even the hands of the cellmates who will not speak to him because they believe he is crazy. Desnos believes he can communicate with the dead, although he says he does not need to hear from them – he knows what they are all thinking. What seems to frighten most of us, though, is his ability to disappear, or make us disappear from his consciousness. One moment someone may be speaking with him and the next moment he is in a trance. No one knows what he is thinking, where he is going: we only know we cannot reach him. It is this realization that makes him disappear. I am frightened, and I am no longer able to wake myself. And I am no longer in his cell with him but in the middle of the night I am in an open field just outside the camp. A light shines on me and suddenly I am surrounded by Nazis again. In broken French a guard asks me what am I doing here. I tell him, "I do not know. I only know I do not belong here." "*Ce n'est pas assez bon*," he says. It is not good enough. He raises his hand to strike me with the butt of his gun, and the moment before he hits me I can see inside the barrel. It is not quite a tunnel or an abyss, but it is almost as though I could see him hiding along the edges of that barrel. And when the gun goes off accidentallyI see arms floating in front of my face, a pair of eyes moving off toward the stars, and a large hand reaching for the back of my neck. I know I will never sleep again.

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# THE REVOLUTION OF 1905

You are watching a film of the Revolution of 1905. Snow is falling slowly, but in swirls. There is some confusion on the screen; you watch the peasants moving back and forth, you catch glimpses of their clothing: the long, rippling capes, the babushkas, those strangely-peaked hats. Every so often you see a face: a skeleton with skin, an open mouth, a row of teeth no longer straight. You have the feeling of hunger, but not hunger itself. Your grandfather is in this crowd, huddled behind a woman he does not know. His wife and children must be somewhere else. You know he is supposed to escape from here, but you do not see how. More and more people fill up the screen, until it is no longer possible to see your grandfather's face, his bulky overcoat, the outline of his body. . .

When the czar arrives the audience is still, as though he still had the power to become flesh. This is a silent film, so when the czar speaks a card covers the screen. It says, "I decree the death of one hundred, no, two hundred workers." The workers put their hands in front of their faces; this is the film-maker's image of fear, his idea of a dog with his tail between his legs, of the hiss of the cat. "But we have done nothing," the next card says, and then there is a picture of the czar, silent, smiling broadly, the snow forming a thin ridge along his shoulders. In the next frame the peasants have disappeared, there is only the snow, and in the background, coming from the factory's brick chimneys, a banner of smoke that covers the screen like fog.

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Then a picture of the palace steps, the white marble, whiter than sunlight, the people falling down those steps, the soldiers pointing their rifles, a soldier playing a trumpet, another a drum, and in the distance a wolf howling, a clearing, a forest of birch trees.

Somehow later there is no snow. There is a march in front of the palace, arms raised in victory, although victory does not seem possible. You do not see your grandfather in the crowd, but then again, you do not see him lying dead in the streets. You know you have missed something, but what? When the film ends the audience walks out of the theatre single-file, as though they were part of an enormous funeral procession. As always, the sunlight outside is too harsh for your eyes. You walk home to your own children, and you have the feeling of sorrow, but not sorrow itself.

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Mike Kempton

# Long Green

Old Halla is dying. Painless, speechless, he sits all day in a padded chair. As the sun shifts, he is spoonfed and wheeled among jungle views. Sometimes he grips a passing arm and holds on. For hours I have felt the flutter of his fingers. Blood eddies through brain muck, changing channels, silently his thoughts flow out on paper. I write for him in strange languages, or suddenly blurt out news I could not know: Congo copper strike; Makhno takes Monkey River. He will blink and nod. At other times his neck twists slowly upward like a vine. His eyes reflect an empty piece of sky and he will bask for hours, hardly breathing. Then his chair seems rooted, no one can budge it. If there are showers, he does not get wet.

I can't remember him before. I must have known him when he whipped his servants, bought governments, built banks and churches. I was a little boy who watched things, like a dog, alert and puzzled. I had a good eye for details. But maybe I only imagined. Nothing changes here, so it's easy to forget.

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My name is Teeto. I've always lived in this house. The indians built it for Halla from a picture of the Mirabell Plantation in La Fronde, Louisiana, U.S.A.

"You are perfectly prepared for life," Miss Luisa tells me as she paces from room to room, observing maids. My grandmother's nerves are bad and require company. "If the wind blows your way, Teeto, when the will is read, you will know how to act correctly. You are not at all like your father."

All she's taught me is how to wait. What can you expect from books and old people? Sometimes I'll get up in the morning ready to leave. My grandmother frowns: the car is broken; the road washed out; red bandits have been spotted; last night Halla suffered spasms; tomorrow the lawyer arrives with a new will. Miss Luisa does not lose many arguments. Maids have cleared away the breakfast dishes and the table is already set for dinner. Smells of roasting meat. "We're in business," whispers Day Willie, coming out of the kitchen with a fresh beer. Day Willie and Night Willie are giant twins, from Africa. They used to travel around giving shows. They could dance on water and catch bullets in their teeth. It was done with magnets, Night Willie told me. Halla hired them as bodyguards, now they nurse him. One is always on duty. They change at dawn and sunset.

Meals are long and heavy. Wherever you sit, you face a mirror. Miss Luisa only takes a little fruit and smiles as each course comes my way. She likes to see me stretch my stomach. Outside, on the porch, Day Willie is feeding Halla. We can hear him calling out each spoonful, "fried beans," followed by a gurgle.

Afterwards, hammocks are slung and the rain arrives. My dreams have plenty of action, but I wake up later with only vague impressions. The air is juicy. Coconut palms rattle above the terrace. Banana leaves flap. Soft light, blown possibilities. "It is," as Miss Luisa usually observes, "a lovely time of day." For what? Sitting through three-

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act sunsets, waiting for the beer truck or walking up an appetite?

It's a few miles to the pyramid, along a jungle path. In the clearing, donkeys graze around wild orange trees. Flocks of parrots swoop or scatter. The ruin is huge and formless, like a sprouting vegetable. Stairways wind in tangles up the sides. On top stands a tower carved with tiny, puzzled faces. A slab of floor slides back. Underneath, a tunnel runs down to a vaulted crypt. Halla will be buried there flanked by Nine Lords of Night in stucco relief. The last tenant was removed to the National Museum.

There are more old cities in the jungle than anyone would bother to discover. The indians take no credit for them. They believe that every fifty-two years a whole new race of people is created in the slime of their Colored Lakes – Frog, Blood, Sky, Piss, Cave – visible from our verandah on clear days. The indians are pale, with delicate features and long black hair. They wear loose white sheets that make it hard to tell men from women. Some still roam in bands, trapping monkeys and chewing mushrooms. The rest work for Halla.

"Long ago, before Halla came," Nica says, "Some men were here to watch us. They took our pictures and poked our teeth. We were food for their machines. They wanted to know our secrets. Why should we tell them? They couldn't even fly by themselves." Nica is the indian housekeeper. She and Miss Luisa have feuded for years. When they meet, they cover their eyes and whisper at each other like passing ghosts. Nica took care of me, after my parents left.

There isn't a trace of them in this house. I only remember a picture that used to hang in my room: a thin man with medals and a woman holding a cat. Once I asked Miss Luisa about it. "That wasn't your parents," she said. "We didn't have a picture of them. Things rot so quickly in this climate. But we thought you needed something as a child,

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so we put that one up."

There were violent fights, Nica told me. My parents had to run away. They went to see a chief. They told him Halla's secret name. Now the forest whispers it – birds, insects, dripping water. The sound keeps Halla paralyzed. When Halla dies they will return. Everybody will return.

Why did they leave me here? It's hard to make sense of what Nica says. Deaf and nearly blind, she speaks to me sometimes as if I were still a baby. Or else she gets lost in the future: "Poor Teeto, they smoked you like a ham, and even your children will forget."

It is Halla's birthday. The usual tributes. Telegrams accumulate in baskets. His former smiles spread on the covers of weekly magazines. The Pope celebrates a mass. Stock markets rally. "Three cheers for the jolly old proprietor!" shouts Day Willie as Presidential jets maneuver overhead in tight formation.

Aunt Lavinia has come for a visit with her daughter Zélide. They will only be staying a few days. Miss Luisa is in a good mood. She likes to supervise arrangements and hear news. Zélide has made a good match, everybody says. Her man is a colonel, just dispatched to crush a small rebellion in the West. When he is finished, they will get married and fly to Europe and play for a while. Aunt Lavinia gives us wonderful accounts. She has had husbands, she has been almost everywhere. Zélide only smiles. She must be a couple of years older than me, maybe twenty-two. It's hard to talk to her. She's like the iridescent birds that dart through our garden and resume migration.

We have a television now, Aunt Lavinia brought it. Zélide and I spend quiet days together watching people dance and kiss or ride around in cars and shoot each other. "It isn't really like that yet," Zélide says, "not even in the cities." The indians come to look too, and mutter in amazement. Our lives used to seem fabulous, but now they

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have seen better: planes that can flap their wings, cans singing their ingredients. It will be a heavy blow to Halla's prestige.

Bad news is beamed in by satellite. Distant angry faces, floods, official denials now disturb our evenings. The others ignore it and continue drinking on the terrace. "What's the good of knowing?" Zélide sighs. We go outside.

"How green the jungle is!" Aunt Lavinia is screaming into Halla's ear. He rolls his eyes, grimacing, spittle drips. "Weaker every day," she turns and whispers to Miss Luisa, who takes this diagnosis calmly. Halla has seldom seemed so animated. His thoughts flash through me, leaping into space: he will outlive us all. This greedy audience amuses him. Who can act or plan? He sits there, blocking time.

Today Zélide got a telegram. Her colonel was shot at Orangewalk with the rest of the Old Guard, after the rebels overran the town. We saw part of it on television. They wheeled in Halla to watch one of his banks burn. He giggled, unimpressed. Zélide accepts condolence gracefully, but she seems bored by grief. Aunt Lavinia, who used to ignore me, now confides: I've always been her favorite; others are conspiring against me; we should join forces. Whatever I say, she winks and laughs. It is impossible to insult her. Zélide and I eye each other warily.

Zélide will not be going north for the funeral. It is not safe to travel. We lie in the path of the rebel advance. They are still four days march from here, but already the servants are getting restless. Dispatched on errands, the maids seldom return. Gardeners squat together, sharpening their pitchforks and machetes. Nica mutters loudly in the kitchen: "Let that old woman ring her bell. Everyone will die soon. There are fires in the lakes . . . new people being made."

Zélide came into my room last night. I was up reading,

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everybody else has gone to sleep. "Your light was on," she said. "I wanted to talk to you alone." We sat on the bed and Zélide told me about boarding school, her stepfathers, summers at the beach, two love affairs, and her engagement. She skipped around a lot, sometimes I had trouble following her. They weren't the kind of stories you find in books. More like little secrets strung together. I didn't have so many of my own and I was happy to listen.

By then the moon had set. I took her out on the balcony and showed her the stars. She would point at one and I would tell her what the indians called it. There was a meteor shower. We leaned against the railing for a long time, not saying anything, just watching. The wind came up before the dawn and we went back inside. Zélide took off her nightgown. Seeing every slow sweet inch of her, I hardly knew where to begin.

All the servants have disappeared. Miss Luisa is not surprised. They have been getting surlier by the year, she says. Now they will see that we can live without them. They will return and beg her forgiveness. She will exact conditions. Meanwhile, the house runs smoothly. The generator throbs, fountains recycle. Zélide and I pick vegetables from the garden. Aunt Lavinia opens cans for dinner. Tepoz Tekko still arrives every afternoon in his truck, painted with flowers, birds and saints. He sings to Zélide while his assistant hands me down cases of beer. I'm jealous.

"Teeto, I don't know how you stand it here," Zélide said. "It's awful being almost rich. Nothing ever happens." I didn't answer, she had curled up and was falling asleep. But I thought about it. . .

I grew up with the indians. Miss Luisa didn't mind, she hardly noticed me then. Sometimes when we played, we took off our clothes and rolled around in arms. You never knew if your partner was a boy or girl, it didn't matter. We

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made up sex together, like songs. We got older and they turned into servants, that was all. I watched their faces change. And Miss Luisa took me in hand. She needed somebody to talk to. Halla was more active then, but he hated being in his chair and used to yell at her if she came near him. At night, sometimes, I visited the maids. They were polite about it, but they didn't laugh or tell strange stories anymore, not when I was there. Maybe now they were dancing with the rebels, or braiding sandals for a long march. I guess I was lonely before Zélide came.

The roosters crowed. I woke her up and we did it again. We fit together perfectly, as if we were the last two people. Our bones bounced, I closed my eyes, expecting to come up joined in some new place.

Every morning Zélide and I lift Halla from his bed, strap on his revolver and settle him in his chair. Then we survey the damage. The generator has been smashed. We are without electricity or running water. They have burned the outbuildings. Our dogs chase donkeys through the gardens, drag them down and eat them. Aunt Lavinia broadcasts for help on the emergency transmitter. Can anybody hear it? The CIA is everywhere, according to Lavinia. They won't let Halla die. Helicopters should be appearing soon. I try to imagine what they will look like. We listen to the short wave – no mention of world-wide revolution, just the ball scores.

Miss Luisa still gathers us to watch the sunset. Smoke is rising from camps throughout the forest, more each day. "They might overlook us," Aunt Lavinia says, "in all this clutter." The beer truck never comes. The road is blocked by huge trees.

Zélide did not come down for breakfast. Aunt Lavinia went to call her and found a note. She has eloped with Tep, the driver of the beer truck.

"It is our fault," Aunt Lavinia said, looking right at me.

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"We did not comfort her enough. A young girl needs excitement. No doubt they will go around the world."

"Tep is a charming young man," Miss Luisa allowed, "and the beer concession is nothing to be sneezed at, not in this climate."

When I put Halla to bed he was heavy. Some days I could lift him with one hand. At night Miss Luisa and Lavinia played canasta, by lantern. I went to bed early. I couldn't sleep. I made up a song:

Zélide's gone,
busted out and left me here
and I don't care.

Today the eclipse came on schedule. Halla and I sat on the terrace and watched it begin. Nobody else was interested. The light turned pale; it got fainter with each blink. Birds screamed; insects swarmed over us. I wanted to shout too. The sun was going out. Then, overhead, we could see a black disk with a shivering corona. Planets appeared, the Colored Lakes were glowing. Day hung on the horizon. Everything had stopped, never such silence . . . I turned to Halla, he was gone. When the sun got back, I noticed a little puddle on the seat of his chair. It looked like honey.

"He has done this sort of thing before," said Miss Luisa when I told her about it. But Lavinia seemed disturbed. You didn't need to be a lawyer to figure out why.

We are finally getting news on the short wave. According to reports, the rebels have changed course. They are marching northeast, toward the oil fields. Government troops, with U.S. air support, are inflicting heavy casualties. The servants still haven't come back. Our food will hold out for months, Aunt Lavinia calculates. Halla stockpiled enough to last a siege. They talk about him in the past tense now, like everything else.

I went for a walk. Two of our dogs, Sapo and Chula,

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raced ahead, chasing smells. The path made a few turns, then straightened out. I looked back but couldn't see the house – just moving green. I was lost. Whenever the path branched, I took the left fork. It was easier to walk in *circles until the dogs got tired and led me home.*

There were strange people along the trail; tall, thickly built, with olive skin and sharp eyes. The dogs barked a lot. Nica could have been right, maybe it was a new race. Miss Luisa would have a hard time making them into servants. They were burning the jungle and clearing fields.

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# *Two Poems by Maxine Chernoff*

## THE FAN

I enter a room where a fan seems to be chanting
"Air! Air! Air!" as it whirrs. I see it's not
the fan, after all, but a child facing the wall
in the far corner of the room.

At the opposite end of the room, a man is seated,
stroking his beard. He keeps repeating, "Yes,
quite excellent. Air wafers. Air wafers."

I turn off the fan and the child and the man stop
instantly, as if slapped in the face.

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# THE MOAT

Two soldiers, masquerading as trees, pass me casually on the street. Aware of the possibility that they're armed, I avert my eyes, questioning their peculiar disguise only to myself. I walk on only to come upon two trees attired as soldiers. I assume that the soldiers and trees have made an even exchange, and, aware of the possibility that the trees, as well as the soldiers could be armed, walk directly toward my home.

Arriving there just after dark I see that the draw-bridge has been raised. I compare my situation to that of a piece of luncheon meat destined for a sandwich, only to find that the bread it was supposed to occupy is already accounted for.

I question the possibility of swimming the narrow width of the channel. Stripping to the waist I notice how my skin catches the eery glare of the moon, making me look terribly anemic. This hypochondriacal observation adds to my fear of attempting the swim. I empty my pockets to make my load lighter and leave their contents, some coins, a key, and a ticket stub, inside of my boot on the bank. As I submerge myself cautiously in the dark water I find that all I can think about is blue, shiny plums. Despite my mind's obsession, I find my arms and legs moving rhythmically, and remark that if they were statesmen, they would be articulate speakers.

Shivering, I lift myself out of the water and knock vigorously on the door, remembering that I've left my key in

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my boot on the other side of the channel. James, the butler, answers the door and acts quite surprised to see me partially undressed. His reaction triggers in me, for the first time this evening, the realization that I am a woman, and, for the first time in the length of his employment with me, that he is a man. He bows graciously and offers me a dry, white towel.

I question the servants unrelentingly and find that not one of them knows why thebridge was raised before I returned home. Satisfied with this answer, I settle down for the evening. My tea, hot and fragrant as ever, is brought to me and I retire to read a rather obscure book of aphorisms, comfortably wrapped in my white, wool shawl, iridescent in the moonlight.

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# *Two Poems by Charles Webb*

## PAPAYAS

"Papaya." A melodious, sexual word. Like "wahini," "Tahiti," "Oahu." The syllables, sweet on his tongue, promised luscious meat, juice like ambrosia, better than anything.

"Papaya." Waterfalls. Flowers. Clear blue seas. Lush islands where it was always 80, and no one got sick. Where women were beautiful, gentle, obliging. Where no one had to have a job, or be bored or envious or a cripple, and every day celebrated something.

When he mentioned his "pet fantasy," friends tried to set him straight. Polynesia had changed. The brown-skinned girls were *True Confessions*-reading bitches. The "innocent" islanders were ex-cannibals who now lifted tourists' money instead of their heads. Pearls were all in Jewish jewelry stores. Papayas had black rat-turd seeds, and tasted like cantaloupe served in a sweaty shoe. Besides, they came from South America.

He would nod and smile, thinking of the South Seas, where life was long and good and easy.

He was always scheduling his "first bite," looking forward for months, then postponing it. The rare days his supermarket had papayas, he would hurry past their stall barely glancing, then feel good for hours.

As an old man dying of kidney failure, he called the nurses "island beauties," and thanked them repeatedly for "the wonderful papayas."

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# SOMETHING NOT STUPID

I've been having small thoughts lately. Bread crumbs instead of yesterday's layer cakes. Am I slipping?

I used to think about love, war, sunsets, injustice, the existence of God. Things people care about. (It sounds stupid even to mention what I used to think about. Though I was much praised for my thoughts.)

Now my best thoughts are "a pair of slippers"; "freckle"; "a place touched by a unicycle".

I used to want to make sense. Then I wanted not to make sense. Now I want only to say something not stupid.

My dirty socks smell like hyacinths which smell like dirty socks.

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# *Two Poems by Ameen Alwan*

## TWENTY-EIGHT

You were twenty-eight this past week—all of you. One would think you'd be twenty-eight part by part—the way the sun rises over a landscape—instead of all at once.

Would you start being twenty-eight in you thighs, your toes, your head?

Would twenty-eight begin in your belly-button?

Your womb, the top of your tongue, in the enamel around your molars? Or in the space between an earlobe and your neck, that little pocket, that little closet of space.

Or would you begin being twenty-eight in your shadow, the knowledge that follows you until it becomes embrazened and suddenly joins itself, clasps itself to you, in bed at night, the light out.

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# THE QUALITY OF LIGHT THAT ENTERS AND ILLUMINATES A TOMATO

It's exciting—in its lower case way. No, it pleases me enormously, to go out in the morning and see that two or three tomatoes have started turning orange-red, to see the reddened ones a little darker, a softness taking hold day by day.

They feel like breasts—the fullness hanging there and that reverberation, that tension you feel when you touch them with your fingertips. Ripeness.

In the kitchen I put some cream cheese on a thin slice of pumpernickel, get some green tea, then leave for work. People are waiting for me.

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*David Lehman*

# "GREETINGS WHERE NO KINDNESS IS"

In my younger and more existential days, the most innocuous of phrases—the ubiquitous "how are you," for example—would cause rockets of nausea to crash in my belly. There was a time, to be sure, when I could answer "fine" with the best of them. Daily vomiting rapidly cured me of that. I began to regard such a question as nothing less than insidious, insuring either an unpleasant or dishonest response, unless, of course, you were genuinely feeling fine, in which case all you could be accused of would be generating boredom or, worse, taunting the others, less fortunate than yourself, to whom the word "fine" must be as cruel as April is to nostalgic poets.

For two full years I stopped and pondered when confronted with a friend's "how are you"—or an enemy's, it made no difference: it itself bespoke eloquent testimony of its speaker's hostility in my regard. It became, purely and simply, the nastiest, most hateful kind of reminder. But one recent afternoon, under the winter sun of Riverside Drive, I was trotting along, minding my own business or, rather, not thinking about anything at all for a change, when the familiar greeting caught me completely offguard. Before I knew it "fine" had trumpeted out of my lips. It was like a gigantic release. I felt relieved, deliciously tired and spent. The word itself was like a self-fulfilling prophecy. I realized, of course, that such accidents happen but rarely, yet my enthusiasm remained undampened; I was moved, stunned, inspired; I had stumbled onto a new strategy, one that I've employed ever since.

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It's easy. Under the circumstances, the truly courageous act is simply to nod (I decided), look meaningfully into the questioner's eyes, firmly say "fine," top it off with "and you?" and then just forget about it. Neither gloating over turning the tables nor dignifying it with a philosophical label. Just forget about it. You've said it, and now you're going to live with it, it isn't that hard anyway, just a word, as evanescent as the air you breathe, and more harmless at that. No one gives a shit when they ask you how you are anyway. Look how much better it is when you don't think before you speak.

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*Albert Goldbarth*

# ORGANIZATION

In order to describe the appropriate action or conduct for any eventuality, we must first codify all eventualities. This is not so much forecasting the future, as it is prescribing all extrapolations of human capabilities; it is thus a concern with, not time, but exigencies extant in inner resources. For instance; in a certain situation with Letitia and Maureen, you act so; such is the style, such is the standard, such is the state. If the style were to differ, how would you act? If the standard were to differ, would Maureen, to you? Or if the state varied, would the "certain situation" exist, could it be conceived of by you, even abstractly, without the decor and the clam-colored fringe and the scent of paraffin settling on the couch-arms, warm and waxy? And then to say: well, given the code and the cast, yes, of course, in such a situation under that style, in this standard, and presupposing another state we could know: no, do not lift it; or, yes, take it, but with a severe reprimand that leaves her with the choice between modest demurral and unrestrained confession; or, neither: either act would be presumptuous, and it is best to use the prearranged token gestures to signify neutrality. This, of course, would modify the possibilities of spontaneous engagement, and possibly obviate individual – that is, autonomous – response entirely; but it would impose an order and, thus, a sense of safety, on even those brash and indiscreet moments: joy or genius, luxury, lust. Not that I recommend the endeavor of such classification, except for the arcane and delightfully motley possibilities inherent in human life on earth that would thereby be revealed. For instance, such a capability: that the scholars of the Chinese court compiled, between the Christian years 1403 and 1407, (and this is true) the Yung-lo ta-tien, an encyclopedia consisting of 11,095 volumes.

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Frederick Bush

# Widow Water

I spent the afternoon driving to New Hartford to the ice cream plant for twenty-five pounds of sliced dry ice. I had them cut the ice into ten-inch long slivers about three-quarters of an inch in width, wrapped the ice in heavy brown paper and drove it back to Brookfield and the widow's jammed drill-point. It's all hard-water country here, and the crimped-pipe points they drive down for wells get sealed with calcium scales if you wait enough years, and the pressure falls, the people call, they worry about having to drill new wells and how much it will cost and when they can flush the toilets again, how long they'll have to wait.

I went in the cellar door without telling her I was there, disconnected the elbow joint, went back out for the ice and, when I had carried the second bundle in, she was standing by her silent well in the damp of her basement, surrounded by furniture draped in plastic sheets, firewood stacked, cardboard boxes of web-crusted Mason jars, the

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growing heaps of whatever in her life she couldn't use.

She was small and white and dressed in sweaters and a thin green housecoat. She said "Whatever do you mean to do?" Her hands were folded across her little chest, and she rubbed her gnarled throat. "Is my well dead?"

"No ma'am. I'd like you to go upstairs while I do my small miracle here. Because I'd like you not to worry. Won't you go upstairs?"

She said "I live alone – "

I said "You don't have to worry."

"I don't know what to do about – this kind of thing. It gets more and more of a problem – this – all this." She waved her hand at what she lived in and then hung her hands at her sides.

I said "You go on up and watch the television. I'm going to fix it up. I'll do a little fixing here and come back tonight and hook her up again and you be ready to make me my after-dinner coffee when I come back. You'll have water enough to do it with."

"Just go back upstairs" she said.

"You go on up while I make it good. And I don't want you worrying."

"Alright, then," she said, "I'll go back up. I get awfully upset now. When these – things. These – I don't know what to do anymore." She looked at me like some thing that was new. Then she said "I knew your father, I think. Was he big like you?"

"You know it" I said. "Bigger. Didn't he court you one time?"

"I think everybody then must have courted me one time."

"You were frisky" I said.

"Not like now" she said. Her lips were white on her white face, the flesh looked like flower petals: pinch them and they crumble, wet dust.

"Don't you feel so good now?"

"I mean kids now."

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"Oh?"

"They have a different notion of frisky now."

"Yes they do" I said. "I guess they do."

"But I don't feel so good" she said. "This. Things like this. I wish they wouldn't happen. Now. I'm very old."

I said "It keeps on coming, doesn't it?"

"I can hear it come. When the well stopped, I thought it was a sign. When you get like me, you can hear it come."

I said "Now listen: you go up. You wrap a blanket around you and talk on the telephone or watch the teevee. Because I guarantee. You knew my father. You knew my father's word. Take mine. I guarantee."

I said "That's my girl." She was past politeness so she didn't smile or come back out of herself to say goodbye. She walked to the stairs and when she started to shuffle and haul the long way up, I turned away to the well pipe, calling "You make sure and have my coffee ready tonight. You wait and make my after-dinner coffee, hear? There'll be water for it." I waited until she went up, and it was something of a wait. She was too tired for stairs. I thought to tell Bella that it looked like the widow hadn't long.

But when she was gone I worked. I put my ear to the pipe and heard the sounds of hollowness, the emptiness under the earth that's not quite silence – like the whisper you hear in the long-distance wires of the telephone before the relays connect. Then I opened the brown paper packages and started forcing the lengths of dry ice down into the pipe. I carried and shoved, drove the ice first with my fingers and then with a piece of copper tube, and I filled the well pipe until nothing more would go. My fingers were red, and the smoke from dry ice misted up until I stood in an underground fog. When nothing more would fit, I capped the pipe, kicked the rest of the ice down into the sump – it steamed as if she lived above a fire, as if always her house was smoldering – and I went out, drove home. I went by the hill roads, and near Excell's farm I turned the motor off, drifted down the dirt road in neu-

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tral, watching. The deer had come down from the high hills and they were moving delicately through the fields of last year's cornstumps, grazing like cattle at dusk, too many to count. When the truck stopped I heard the rustle as they pulled the tough silk. Then I started the motor – they jumped, stiffened, watched me for a while, went back to eating: a man could come and kill them, they had so little fear – and I drove home to Bella and a tight house, long dinner, silence for most of the meal, then talk about the children while I washed the dishes and she put them away.

And then I drove back to the house that was dark except for one lighted window. The light was yellow and not strong. I turned the engine off and coasted in. I went downstairs on the tips of my toes because, I told myself, there was a sense of silence there, and I hoped she was having some rest. I uncapped the well pipe and gases blew back, a stink of the deepest cold, and then there was a sound of climbing, filling up, and water banged to her house again. I put the funnel and hose on the mouth of the pipe and filled my jeep can, then capped the check valve, closed the pipe that delivered the water upstairs, poured water from the jeep can through the funnel in to prime the pump, switched it on, watched the pressure needle climb to thirty-eight pounds, opened the faucet to the upstairs pipes and heard it gush. I hurried to get the jeep can and hose and funnel and tools to the truck, and I had closed the cellar door and driven off before she made the porch to call me. I wanted to get back to Bella and tell her what a man she was married to – who could know so well the truths of ice that he could calculate its gases would build up pressure enough to force the scales from a sealed-in pipe and make a dead well live.

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*Vern Rutsala*

# YOU

You are the secret conscience of the age.
Your power is confirmed
in the milkman's punctuality.
And likewise the paperboy
honors you with paper.
Every day such events
argue the fine print
of your significance
and this says nothing of the seasons –
the way they change –
or the tides or the snow on mountains.
They all pay homage to your majesty.
Indirection is the method –
your name kept secret
for the sake of antarctica's integrity
and the sacred ovoid of the egg.
Thus your obscurity legislates.
Everyone reads the volumes of your silence.
Everyone studies your omissions.
Yet you neglect nothing, you take responsibility
for it all; you have high principles
and a strong sense of duty.
Without you the signature of all things
would be illegible. Without you
box-scores would lie
and the seas run dry.
You see this everywhere, these examples
of your strength – the moon
your baseball, the law of gravity
your invention. The mailman's daily passage

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says so, the rising sun
affirms it. All bow down, all sing praises
with their actions –
bartender and shoe clerk, the voice
that gives the time on telephones.
All obey.
You are the secret law that all revere,
alpha and omega,
the force that causes runs in stockings,
the absentee landlord of the lice,
the keeper of bees and brothers.
All kowtow.
All sing your praises –
the wetness of rain, the heat of summer,
the blackness of coffee,
the eyes of needles,
the spokes of wheels,
the links of chains.
You see the signs
and are comforted.
The attendant who sells you gas
shows deference.
The grocery clerk speaks softly.
Your breakfast spoon reflects
your face. Your bed
is always ready.
Your omniscience is astounding.
Your key turns and the door opens –
a sign!
Your coins fit slots
in cigarette machines –
a sign!
Signs! Signs! Everything you touch
answers you.
The movie usher calls you "Sir"!

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# *Two Poems by Aram Saroyan*

## MADNESS

I used to believe that nobody was really crazy,
That people were all basically good. Sometimes it was
A question of coaxing them, a little, but in the end
You'd get back what you gave and more even.

But as I grew older I learned that's not always the case.
You have evil in this world as you have anything else.
I remember the first time I noticed someone was crazy.
It wasn't interesting, really; I only wanted to leave

And go someplace else. There was nothing to discuss.
The fact is it was boring. I had no impulse to make
myself
Clear because that isn't possible – there was no inter-
Action at all; nothing but the rushing noise of a bird

Trying to escape a cage, its wing sticking out, or its head,
But never its whole self. The talk is self-obsessed.
Being inside the cage has made it a sudden stranger to
the air,
And whatever appears in it. But the cage is not there

At all. There is only a person, one who looks deceptively
Like you or me, except for a certain deadness
– recognizable,
After a while – in the eyes. If you spend any time at all
You notice a tendency to repeat, the mind is trapped in a

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Vicious circle, trying to make itself supreme over
Everything by accepting nothing but its own hysteria.
It would be sad, I suppose, except that it is uglier
than that.
You find yourself looking away, after awhile, and when
you

Look again — you find the same thing. It goes on and on.
It has nothing to do with you. It has nothing to do
with anybody,
Not even the person there in front of you. They are
possessed,
Not by their own bodies, but by the evil that is very much

Part of this world. They are weak — or they were, I guess,
Before the evil entered them. Why else would they let
it in?
But once it happens they acquire the power of what has
Entered them, the power of evil. I believe this power

Is of no small consequence, as witness the evil of this
world.
But I believe the power of good is of greater force, in
the end.
The man who makes himself the vehicle of the power
of good
Causes the man of evil to become envious and finally
suicidal.

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# I'M THE MISSISSIPPI

I'm the Mississippi. Nothing
Can stop me. Everything goes my way
Or I flow over, around, or under it,
Changing my dimensions as I go.

Trees, rocks, the animal and human kingdom
Are all passengers of my will. I treat them
As they treat me, loving the way I go on and on
Until I meet the sea. I'm the Mississippi.

Men sail me as I sail them, no better and
No worse. I'm a river, in the end, not a destination.
Nothing comes between me and my own motion.
I embrace it, and it becomes me, the Mississippi.

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# *Two Poems by Greg Kuzma*

## SOME OF THE THINGS THAT DID NOT HAPPEN

The air did not crack in two.
There were no halves, only wholes.
We were surrounded, the trees leaned
close. The trees didn't yank up their
roots though. It wasn't dark. I
wasn't by myself. Nor had I been
lonely. And I wasn't lonely.

Cars went about their business.
They weren't all black, though
funeral was in the air. Some, even,
were yellow. One stopped by our
front door. But no one got out.
I heard a radio. And then I didn't.
There was a trace of some odd
perfume down among the trees. Had
I stayed longer there
it might have lasted longer. As
it is, I can barely remember it.

The cats remained upon their cushions.
Though they did not sleep. Birds
jumped safe in branches, out of
reach. No bird was caught and
eaten, though we might have dreamed
it. The day got hotter though we
did not sweat.

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We did not cry out in alarm. Jill
did fall down, and something spilled.
We did not end up staying up,
we did not spend the night in
argument. We drank some wine, but
not too much. And no one hurried
home, though home was destination
for us all. We simply did not hurry.

For a moment early in the day it
seemed that things would turn out
different. But here you have it
as it was. It was no other. I
would tell you were it so.

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# WE

We begin, we extend, we reach forth, we
entice, we commence, we begin to dream, we
accept, we deny, we grow more purposeful, we
engage, we politely refuse, we let things slide,
we reduce things to basics, we scatter the basics,
we utter the first words, we conceal the last words,
we prepare ourselves to be guardians of hours,
and then we scatter the hours, we propose, we
intrude, we contract and break down, we weep,
we go out along the lonely roads, we suggest, we
steep ourselves, we recommend, we sit silent and
then we are called up, we go forth, and then
we come home. We sit at home. We stare, we
see, we rise, we go down, we fall asleep, we
are marched around in our dreams, mistaken for
others, we are others, we become the dead, we
proclaim how the dead live in us, we see how
well we are on our way to them, we apply the
brakes but someone has stolen the brakes, we
jump from our speed and begin tumbling.
We stop. It is quiet in the room. Someone
is taking our temperature. We hear a plant
breathing. We thank ourselves for being
what we are. We congratulate ourselves for
keeping our eyes and ears open. We sit there
guarding our breath with our most sincere
desperation. A day passes, another, another.
We are up and around. We are full of bravado.
We are pleased to be coming forth, mildly,
our fingers sensitive as nipples. We take

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our eyes out. We are listed in the telephone directory. We learn to grow in our respect for all these things which have survived. We smile and laugh and sing and stay quiet and it is for something, and the something passes. We go on. We begin again out of the rubble that is nothing to us. We begin again out of the rubble that is everything. If we stumble it is because we stumble once in a while.

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*Paul Anderson*

## FALLING

I won't pretend I haven't ever cried;
that would be rather foolish under the circumstances;
I have been myself at times astonished
by my lachrymose qualities, much less quantities,
tears, big as onions,
lying on countertops like misplaced dew,
*heaped in my lap like paste.*
I'm one solid teardrop,
a bald-headed man curled up
in a rainstorm.
The problem is
I can't answer the simplest questions –
how many daybreaks does it take
to make one day? which came first
the streetwalker or the street?
if a sob were an ocean liner where would it port-of-call?
I'd like to say
practice makes perfect, but,
like losing one's teeth,
some things are more difficult the second time.
And after that, well, nobody gets paid
for something anybody can do.
I have been trying to be more useful,
learn a trade,
use my talents and abilities in constructive ways,
building tear chains and sand castles –
but who wants evaporating trinkets;
who wants a house rain can knock down?

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You see my dilemma.
It's like drinking or falling –
can't stop there –
one sip is too much and so on.
To recapitulate –
learning to walk was O.K.
at the time
but the consequences were not clearly defined.
Yesterday stands at the rail waving her hanky;
I'm left holding a 150 lb. bag
of obsolete saltwater.
It's getting so I can't walk around my own room
without tripping over a puddle.
It gets to the point
where too much is simply too much –
some well-meaning person comes and, "There, there,
    feel better?",
I fly into a paroxysm, shouting, biting the tablecloth.
This will never do.
So it comes down to the question of pretense:
I won't pretend I never cry –
that would be rather fantastic considering the circumstances –
but I will pretend I've stopped.

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Ray Russell

# Rational Moments

Dmitri Shostakovich was born in 1906 in what is now Leningrad and began composing music at the age of eleven. Although chiefly known for his powerful symphonies, some of his finest ideas have been expressed in the form of chamber music. In these smaller works, many of the bold effects of his dramatic orchestral creations are foreshadowed. His Quintet for Piano and Strings, Opus 57, was first performed on November 23, 1940, in Moscow. The present recording of this composition, by the Coeval Quartet with Jenö Turai at the keyboard, will surely take its place in that small, select pantheon reserved for historic performances.

The work is quintessential (dare one say quintetsential?) Shostakovich. In it, one hears that characteristic blend of melting lyricism and pulsing rhythmic energy so typical of his music, the whole liberally seasoned with delicious harmonies and pungent dissonances. The first movement begins with the solo piano, playing *Lento* in the

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faded-lavender key of G Minor. Soon, that percussive monster with the 88 teeth is joined by the strings: the gleaming gold of the first and second violins, the tarnished silver of the viola, the ruddy sunset-copper of the cello. This merging of strings and piano produces what many consider to be a ravishing sound, although a small minority does not share that view. The second movement is a fugue, and it, too, is in the key of G Minor (one wonders why?). Is Dmitri Dmitrievich fixated on that key? Possibly not, because the scherzo, which follows, is in B Major, the fourth movement is in D Minor, and the champagne sparkle of the *Allegretto* finale (reminiscent of Mumm's Extra Dry; I prefer Piper Heidsick) returns again to G, but this time G *Major* — the composer almost seems to be snapping his fingers at us and saying "So *there*!" I won't go so far as to say he is sticking out his tongue.

To return for a moment to the first sentence, above, it was perhaps incautious to have written "what is now Leningrad." That great city has been known as St. Petersburg, as Petrograd, as Leningrad, and by the time these notes appear in print, it may have undergone yet another change of name. Nothing in life is certain. All passes; art alone endures. This Leningrad business will be adjusted in a subsequent draft.

A few persons, blessed or cursed with a strange supersensitivity to musical tonalities and colorations, find the wedding of strings and piano to be of the shotgun sort; less than ideal. The pitting of a tempered instrument (the piano) against untempered instruments (the strings) produces to their ears an anomaly, an imperfect mix, a clashing of colors. They say "it doesn't work." The late Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, for this reason, although sometimes persuaded by a variety of circumstances to write for that combination, much preferred the sound of guitar or harp against strings. The contemporary American composer, Herman Stein (whose witty *Sour Suite* for woodwinds has been recorded on another label, Crystal

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S811), has confessed to this writer that piano and strings evokes in his mind an image of the mechanical imposed upon the natural. "It's like mixing typeface with longhand, or lines drawn with the aid of a ruler with lines drawn without a ruler, but whatever you do, don't quote me," unquote. He finds the combination "unsatisfactory," though not actually uncomfortable.

I find it excruciating. When that fixed, rigid, robot piano tone collides with the fluid, human tone of the malleable strings, my teeth are set on edge. I wince. I want to scream. At times I have done so, I am told.

Uncharitable as it may seem to say it, one cannot help thinking that a person who would compose music for such an unseemly congress of instruments must lack some vital ingredient of true genius. He could not be blamed for this lack, of course (one hesitates to accuse him of deliberate malice, although this cannot be totally dismissed as a possibility, however remote). Might there have been some justice, after all, in the official censure of this man in 1936 (the *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* affair), and the later suppression of his *Limpid Stream* ballet, not to mention the post-World War II banning of his works, which was lifted only in 1956? Where there is smoke, is there not also fire?

The questions arise (I hear them on your lips already): What about Beethoven? What about Brahms? What about all those sonatas for violin or viola or cello *and piano* which most of the great composers have given us?

The present writer refuses to be put into the position of defaming the acknowledged masters of the past (Beethoven's Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Opus 135 – to name only one work among many – has afforded me pleasure of almost unbearable intensity and brought me to the point of ecstatic tears so copious that only heavy sedation could stem their flow), but can one really respect Brahms after hearing his Trio in C Major, Opus 87, *with piano*? I shall never forget the disgust that welled up within me when I first heard, to my horror, that sequence of about a dozen

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notes (*not* twelve-tone, needless to say!) so gross and vulgar, so banal, that they were later grafted to the words "Be my love, for only you can end this yearning" and brayed by a Hollywood tenor. So Brahms me no Brahmses, dear liner-notes reader.

Those of us who travel by air a good deal, to digress briefly, have resented the dearth of Bach and other pre-Romantic composers in earplug concerts. Berlioz in plenty, yes indeed, and who can escape that inflight favorite, the flashy, trashy *Planets* of Holst? One long longuer, you will agree, I trust?

I can be sound asleep and yet hear every note of music playing in the room. Nobody believes me when I tell them this. I will be oblivious to verbal communication, radio announcers' words will go unheard, I can be actually snoring, even dreaming, but no music will be lost on me. Sometimes it will take shape in my sleeping mind, appearing as children's blocks, many-hued, a different color for every note, building themselves into tall chords or arranging themselves in serpentine rows of solid, visible melody.

These words are being dictated. I dislike this form of writing, I feel a need to shape the words with my own hands, I take a craftsman's pride in the way I build my sentences, I am even a little vain about my style, which at times can be easy and colloquial, at other times as ceremonial and stately as a Purcell trumpet voluntary, but the plain fact is that I am nearly blind. If I allow myself to listen to anything later than the very *earliest* Beethoven, I may go completely blind.

The lights went out the last time I listened to the Eroica. The fugue in the second movement. Apparently, the big climaxes of Romantic music are too emotional for me, too violent and tumultuous; they send my blood pressure rocketing, overload the capillaries of my eyes and blow them out. Now I am forbidden by my doctors to listen to anything composed later than 1820. It is a cruel cross, *croce crudel d'angoscie*, as Otello sings in the opera I

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may no longer hear. I hunger for the Sibelius violin concerto, and for so much more. Some day, perhaps . . .

One night, Wagner had a nightmare. He was being carried downward by swift waters, down, down, deeper and deeper. "The rushing of the waters," he tells us, "appeared to me as the musical notes of the E flat Major chord, from which arpeggios rose unceasingly . . . never departing from the simple triadic tonality of the E flat Major chord . . . I woke in terror . . . I realized at once that the orchestral introduction to *Rheingold*, as I had been carrying it about without being able to find it, had come up inside me."

That morning, he began writing *Rheingold*. The timelessness of that opening, that unending stretch of music without modulation, without even a change of chord, is awesomely appropriate to that mythic drama which exists out-of-time and takes place before the beginning of the world. Listen to it (I no longer can) and feel yourself drowned in E.

"I have been told by a skillful music-therapist that the note E seems to possess particular emotional significance for the mentally disturbed children who come to her . . . " (I am quoting Robert Donington now.) "At this, I pricked up my ears, remembering a dream . . . in which I watched the actual birth of a baby to the accompaniment of a musical note so prolonged and so vivid that when I woke I had the impulse to check the pitch of it against my piano. It was a somewhat flat E or sharp E flat."

And we must not forget Smetana, poor man, gone deaf like Beethoven before him, but with a difference. Beethoven was shrouded in silence. Smetana was tortured by a high, strident, piercing, unceasing tone in his head. It stopped only when he died – at least it is to be hoped it stopped then. The tormented man wrote the note into the violin part of his autobiographical string quartet, *From My Life*. You can hear it and share his pain. The note is E.

And so I drift again, unconsciously or by plan, I don't

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know which, to strings, to rosin and cat-gut, coming back ring-around-a-rosy. I must not shirk or shrink from naughty Shostakovich, our good Dmitri, who is, God damn him, my topic. It would be churlish to avoid him, would it not? Why should I try? I won't. I must and will now focus all my rambling thoughts and wayward words upon my job, his work, this disc.

(The attentive reader is aware of a deliberate omission in the preceding paragraph and has guessed that I, like Smetana, hear that fiendish note day and night. When I sleep, I dream it. Often I see it. It is a skull. Very white. Black fire burns in the eye-holes. The teeth are piano keys. The skull, moreover, is my own.)

The Coeval Quartet has garnered an international reputation for interpreting the chamber music of Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Hindemith, Carter and other moderns. Jeno Turai, after his sensational 1965 debut in Paris, playing the Khachaturian concerto, has specialized in modern piano compositions. Those of you whose sensibilities have not been honed as keen as mine must not feel guilty at enjoying this lovely Quintet. Even *I* was able to do so once, not by listening to it, never that, the hellish wrestling of piano and strings, but by reading the score and *seeing* the music pure, unsullied by tonality or texture. Then – this was, of course, some time ago, before the Eroica burst my eyes – then the printed staves could live for me outside the auditory world, on clean crisp paper; each note was un-mortal, invulnerable, free of the flesh, the sweaty fingers of performers, liberated from the sordidness of sound, high above all that, above the clouds as well, among the cherubim (literally, "they who shine") and the seraphim ("they who burn"). But play this record. Appreciate, but be wary. Listen to Dmitri. Lend him your ears, but not your soul. Put a little distance between you. Don't allow these harmonies and rhythms to take control of you. Resist the enchantment of the fourth movement's long, hypnotic melodies. Breathe deeply. Check your pulse

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now and then. Take your temperature. Let the music shine and burn, not you. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and in the hour of our death.

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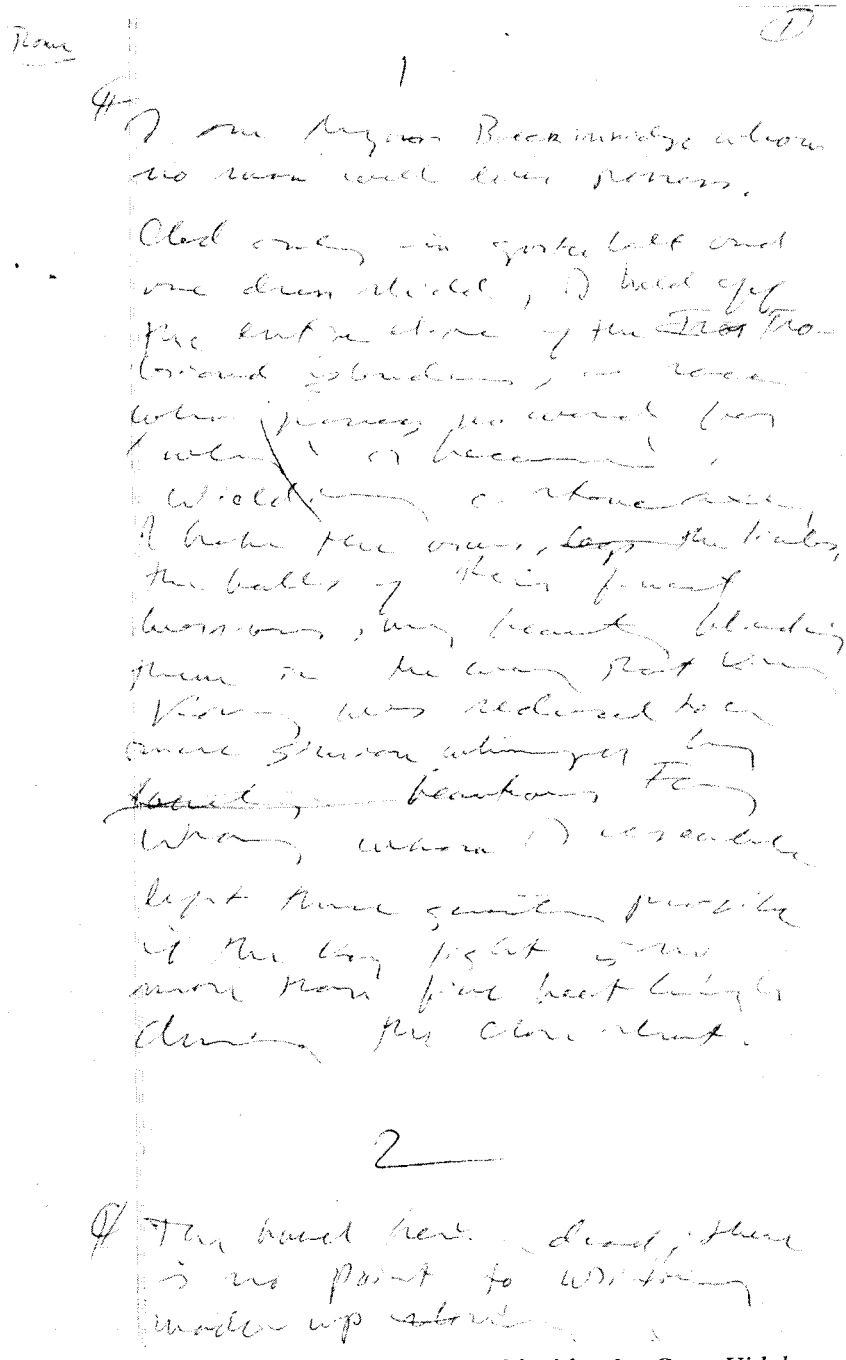

*manuscript page from* Myra Breckinridge *by Gore Vidal*

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# The Art of Fiction L

# Gore Vidal

*Don Bachardy*

*Gore Vidal lives in a rundown penthouse above Rome's Largo Argentina: reconstructed temples from the pre-Augustan era are set incongruously in the middle of what looks to be Columbus Circle without the charm. It is August. Rome is deserted. The heat is breathtaking during the day but at sundown a cool wind starts and the birds swarm in the blue-gold Tiepolo sky. He sits on a large terrace lined with plants in need of watering.*

*In photographs, or television, Gore Vidal appears to be dark haired and somewhat slight. He is neither. He stands*

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*six feet; his chest is broad and deep (a legacy of Alpine ancestors); despite constant attendance at a gymnasium the once flat stomach is now reorganizing itself as a most definite paunch. He regards his own deterioration with fascination, "After all, in fifteen months I shall be fifty," he declares, apparently pleased and disturbed in equal parts.*

*His hair is light brown, evenly streaked with white. His teeth are meticulously capped. The agate yellow eyes are myopic and when he does not wear glasses he tends to squint. The voice . . . well, everyone knows the voice. He sits now in a broken wicker armchair; the baroque dome of San Andrea della Valle appears to float above his head. He wears a blue shirt, gray trousers, sandals. Although he talks naturally in complete sentences, he is not at ease talking about his own work . . . he prefers that others be the subject of* his *scrutiny. An accomplished debater, he tends to slip away from the personal, the inconvenient. G. V.*

INTERVIEWER

When did you first start writing?

VIDAL

I would suppose at five or six, whenever I learned how to read. Actually, I can't remember when I was *not* writing. I was taught to read by my grandmother. Central to her method was a tale of unnatural love called "The Duck and the Kangaroo." Then, because my grandfather, Senator Gore, was blind I was required early on to read grownup books to him, mostly constitutional law and, of course, the Congressional Record. The later continence of my style is a miracle, considering those years of piping the Additional Remarks of Mr. Borah of Idaho.

INTERVIEWER

When did you begin your first novel?

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VIDAL

At about seven. A novel closely based on a mystery movie I had seen, something to do with *The Blue Room* or *Hotel* (not Stephen Crane's). I recall, fondly, that there was one joke. The character based on my grandmother kept interrupting everybody because "she had not been listening." Merriment in the family during the first reading. It doesn't take much to launch a wit. Then I wrote a great deal of didactic poetry, all bad. With puberty the poetry came to resemble *Invictus*, the novels *Of Human Bondage*. Between 14 and 19 I must have begun and abandoned six novels.

INTERVIEWER

How far did you get on these novels?

VIDAL

A few chapters, usually. I did get halfway through the one written before *Williwaw*. All about someone who deserted from the Army—no doubt reflecting my state of mind since I was in the Army during the war (from seventeen to twenty). Unfortunately my protagonist deserted to Mexico. Since I had never been to Mexico, I was obliged to stop.

INTERVIEWER

What were the other five about? School?

VIDAL

No. I began the first really ambitious one when I was 14 or 15. I had gone to Europe in the summer of '39 and visited Rome. One night I saw Mussolini in the flesh at the Baths of Caracalla—no, he was not bathing but listening to "Turandot." The Baths are used for staging operas. I thought him splendid! That jaw, that splendid emptiness. After all, I had been brought up with politicians. He was an exotic variation on something quite familiar to me. So I started a novel about a dicatator in Rome, filled with intrigue and passion and Machiavellian combinazione. But

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that didn't get finished either despite my close study of the strategies of E. Phillips Oppenheim.

INTERVIEWER

Finishing *Williwaw* at 19 broke the barrier; it was published and you wrote three novels in quick succession.

VIDAL

Yes. Every five minutes it seemed. Contrary to legend, I had no money. Since I lived on publishers' advances, it was fairly urgent that I keep on publishing every year. But of course I *wanted* to publish every year. I felt no strain, though looking back over the books I can detect a strain in the writing of them. Much of the thinness of those early novels is simply the pressure that I was under. Anyway, I've gone back and re-written several of them. They are still less than marvelous but better than they were.

INTERVIEWER

What do you feel about going back and re-writing? Don't you think in a way that you're changing what another person, the younger Vidal, did?

VIDAL

No. You are stuck with that early self for good or ill, and you can't do anything about it even if you want to—short of total suppression. For me revising is mostly a matter of language and selection. I don't try to change the narrative or the point of view, except perhaps toward the end of *The City and the Pillar*. I felt obligated to try a new kind of ending. But something like *Dark Green, Bright Red* needed a paring away of irrelevancies—the fault of all American naturalistic writing from Hawthorne to—well, name almost any American writer today. I noticed recently the same random accretion of details in William Dean Howells—a very good writer—yet since he is unable to select the *one* detail that will best express his meaning, he gives us everything that occurs to him and the result is often a shapeless daydream. Twain, too, rambles and ram-

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bles, hoping that something will turn up. In his best work it does rather often. In the rest—painful logorrhea.

INTERVIEWER

You once said that the test of a good work, or a perfect work, is whether the author can re-read it without embarrassment. How did you feel when you re-read your early books?

VIDAL

Sometimes less embarrassed than others. Re-reading *Williwaw*, I was struck by the coolness of the prose. There is nothing in excess. I am still impressed by that young writer's control of his very small material. When I prepared the last edition, I don't suppose I cut away more than a dozen sentences. The next book, on the other hand, *In a Yellow Wood*, is in limbo forever. I can't rewrite it because it's so bad that I can't re-read it. The effect, I fear, of meeting and being 'enscorcelled' by Anais Nin. Or Jack London meets Elinor Glynn. Wow!

INTERVIEWER

What about your first 'successful' novel, *The City and the Pillar*?

VIDAL

A strange book because it was, as they say, the first of its kind, without going into any great detail as to *what* its kind is. To tell such a story then was an act of considerable moral courage. Unfortunately, it was not an act of very great artistic courage since I chose deliberately to write in the flat, gray, naturalistic style of James T. Farrell. Tactically if not aesthetically, this was for a good reason. Up until then homosexuality in literature was always exotic: Firbank, on the one hand; green carnations, on the other. I wanted to deal with an absolutely ordinary, all-American, lower-middle-class young man and his world. To show the dead-on 'normality' of the homosexual experience. Unfortunately, I didn't know too many lower middle-class, all-

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American young men—except for those years in the Army when I spent a good deal of time blocking out my fellow soldiers. So I made it all up. But the result must have had a certain authenticity. Tennessee Williams read it in 1948 and said of the family scenes, "Our fathers were very much alike." He was surprised when I told him that Jim Willard and his family were all invented. Tennessee also said, "I don't like the ending. I don't think you realized what a good book you had written." At the time, of course, I thought the ending "powerful."

INTERVIEWER

Now you've changed the ending to have the young man —Bob—not killed by Jim as he was originally.

VIDAL

Yes. Twenty years ago it was thought that I had written a tragic ending because the publishers felt that the public would not accept a happy resolution for my tale of Sodom, my Romeo and his Mercutio. But this wasn't true. The theme of the book which, as far as I know, no critic has ever noticed, is revealed in the title, *The City and the Pillar*. Essentially, I was writing about the romantic temperament. Jim Willard is so overwhelmed by a first love affair that he finds all other lovers wanting. He can only live in the past, as he imagined the past; or in the future as he hopes it will be when he finds Bob again. He has no present. So whether the first love object is a boy or girl is not really all that important. The novel was not about the City so much as about the Pillar of Salt, the looking back that destroys. Nabokov handled this same theme with infinitely greater elegance in *Lolita*. But I was only twenty when I made my attempt while he was half as old as time. Anyway, my story could only have had a disastrous ending. Obviously, killing Bob was a bit much even though the original narrative was carefully vague on that point. Did he or didn't he kill him? Actually what was being killed was the idea of perfect love that had existed only in the roman-

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tic's mind. The other person—the beloved object—had forgotten all about it.

INTERVIEWER

What is the procedure once a book is revised? Do publishers accept this with grace? Are the old books recalled from libraries?

VIDAL

*Williwaw* and *Messiah* were only slightly altered, *The City and the Pillar* was much revised. *The Judgment of Paris* was somewhat cut but otherwise not much altered. *Dark Green, Bright Red* was entirely rewritten. Except for *The City and the Pillar*, the new versions first appeared in paper back. Later the revised *Messiah* and *The Judgment of Paris* were also re-issued in hard cover. I have no idea what the publishers thought of all this. It is not wise to solicit the opinions of publishers—they become proud if you do. As lovers of the environment, I suspect they were pleased that the new versions were so much shorter than the old, thus saving trees. The original editions can also be found in the libraries, margins filled with lewd commentaries, and the worms busy in the binding.

INTERVIEWER

Has anyone else done such a wholesale revision of his past work?

VIDAL

I shouldn't imagine that any American writer would want to do anything that reflected on the purity and the spontaneity of his genius at any phase of his sacred story. In the land of the free, one sentence must be as good as another because that is democracy. Only Henry James set out methodically to rewrite his early books for the New York Edition. Some works he improved; others not. Tennessee, come to think of it, often rewrites old plays, stories. . .it's sort of a tic with him. Returning to an earlier time, different mood.

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INTERVIEWER

You have said that *The Judgement of Paris* was your favorite of the early books.

VIDAL

It was the first book I wrote when I settled in on the banks of the Hudson River for what proved to be twenty years of writing, my Croisset . . . . Certainly *The Judgment of Paris* was the novel in which I found my own voice. Up until then I was very much in the American realistic tradition, unadventurous, monochromatic, haphazard in my effects. My subjects were always considerably more interesting than what I was able to do with them. This is somewhat the reverse of most young writers, particularly young writers today.

INTERVIEWER

You mean they're proficient technically but don't have much to say?

VIDAL

They appear to rely on improvisation to get them to the end of journeys that tend to be circular.

INTERVIEWER

Which works and which authors are you thinking of?

VIDAL

Well, as I was talking I was thinking of a book—any book—by someone called Brautigan. I can never remember the titles. The last little book I looked at is about a librarian. Written in the See Jane Run style. Very cheerful. Very dumb. Highly suitable for today's audience. But he's not exactly what I had in mind. There is one splendid new—to me—writer. Robert Coover. He, too, is circular but the circles he draws enclose a genius of suggestion. Particularly that story in *Pricksongs and Descants* when the narrator creates an island for you *on the page*. No rude art his. Also *Omensetter's Luck* by William Gass. A case of lan-

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guage doing the work of the imagination, but doing it very well.

INTERVIEWER

What is there in writing except language?

VIDAL

In the writing of novels there is the problem of how to shape a narrative. And though the search for new ways of telling goes on—I've written about this at terrible length[1] —I don't think there are going to be any new discoveries. For one thing, literature is not a science. There is no new formula. Some of us write better than others; and genius is never forced. There are signs that a number of writers—University or U-writers, as I call them—are bored with the narrative, character, prose. In turn they bore the dwindling public for novels. So Beckett stammers into silence, and the rest is cinema. Why not?

INTERVIEWER

But in the forties. . .

VIDAL

In the forties I was working in the American tradition of straight narrative, not very different from John P. Marquand or John Steinbeck or Ernest Hemingway. For me it was like trying to fence in a straitjacket. In fact, my first years as a writer were very difficult because I knew I wasn't doing what I should be doing, and I didn't know how to do what I ought to be doing. Even interestingly conceived novels like *Dark Green, Bright Red* or *A Search for the King* came out sounding like poor Jim Farrell on a bad day. Not until I was 25, had moved to my house in the country, was poor but content and started to write *The Judgment of Paris*, that suddenly I was all there, writing in my own voice. I had always had a tendency to rhetoric—Senator Borah, remember? But fearing its excess, I was too inhibited to write full voice. I don't know what happened. The influence of Anais Nin? The fact that I had stopped

[1] "On the French New Novel," *Encounter* (December, 1967). Also, collected in *Homage to Daniel Shays* (Random House, 1973).

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trying to write poetry and so the poetic line fused with the prose? Who knows? Anyway, it was a great release that book. Then came *Messiah*. Unfortunately my reputation in '54 was rock-bottom. The book was ignored for a few years, to be revived in the universities. Dead broke, I had to quite writing novels for ten years—just as I was hitting my stride. I don't say that with any bitterness because I had a very interesting ten years. But it would have been nice to have gone on developing, uninterruptedly, from *Messiah*.

INTERVIEWER

What voice are you using now?

VIDAL

My own. But I confess to a gift for mimicry. The plangent cries of Mrya are very unlike the studied periods of Aaron Burr but the same throat, as it were (deep, deep), sings the song of each. I envy writers like Graham Greene who, year in and year out, do the same kind of novel to the delight of the same kind of reader. I couldn't begin to do that sort of thing. I have thrown away a number of successful careers out of boredom. I could have gone on after *The City and the Pillar* writing shocking John Rechy novels, but chose not to. My first two Broadway plays were successful, and I could have continued for a time to be a popular year-in, year-out playwright. Chose not to. Chose not to keep on as a television playwright. Then once *Julian* did well, I could have gone on in *that* genre. The same with *Washington, D.C.*, when I, inadvertently, captured the mind and heart of the middle-class, middle-aged, middle-brow lady who buys hard-cover novels—not to mention the book clubs. But then I let *Myra* spring from my brow, armed to the teeth, eager to lose me ladies, book clubs, bookchat writers—everything in fact except her unique self, the only great "woman" in American literature.

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INTERVIEWER

And *Burr*? You seem to have got them all back again?

VIDAL

Doubtless a misunderstanding. I had assumed that *Burr* would be unpopular. My view of American history is much too realistic. Happily, Nixon who made me a popular playwright (the worst man in *The Best Man* was based on him) again came to the rescue. Watergate so shook the 3% of our population who read books that they accepted *Burr*, a book that ordinarily they would have burned while reciting the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

INTERVIEWER

Is it true that you were thinking of putting out *Myra Breckinridge* under a pseudonym?

VIDAL

No. Oh, well, yes. I wanted to make an experiment. To publish a book without reviews or advertising or a well-known author's name. I wanted to prove that a book could do well simply because it was interesting—without the support of bookchat writers. Up to a point, the experiment worked. The book was widely read long before the first reviews appeared. But for the experiment to have been perfect my name shouldn't have been on the book. I didn't think of that till later. Curious. Twenty years ago, after *Messiah* was published, Harvey Breit of the *New York Times* said, "You know, Gore, anything you write will get a bad press in America. Use another name. Or do something else." So for ten years I did something else.

INTERVIEWER

Why will you always get a bad press?

VIDAL

That's more for you to determine than for me. I have my theories, no doubt wrong. I suspect that the range of my activity is unbearable to people who write about

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books. Lenny Bernstein is not reviewed in the *New York Times* by an unsuccessful composer or by a student at Jullaird. He might be better off if he were, but he isn't. Writers are the only people who are reviewed by people of their own kind. And their own kind can often be reasonably generous—*if* you stay in your category. I don't. I do many different things rather better than most people do one thing. And envy is the central fact of American life. Then of course I am The Enemy to so many. I have attacked both Nixon and the Kennedys—as well as the American Empire. I've also made the case that American literature has been second-rate from the beginning. This caused distress in bookchat land. They *knew* I was wrong, but since they don't read foreign or old books, they were forced to write things like "Vidal thinks Victor Hugo is better than Faulkner." Well, Hugo *is* better than Faulkner, but to the residents of bookchat land Hugo is just a man with a funny name who wrote *Les Miserables*, a movie on the Late Show. Finally, I am proud to say that I am most disliked because for twenty-six years I have been in open rebellion against the heterosexual dictatorship in the United States. Fortunately, I have lived long enough to see the dictatorship start to collapse. I now hope to live long enough to see a sexual democracy in America. I deserve at least a statue in Dupont Circle—along with Dr. Kinsey.

INTERVIEWER

You often refer to critics.

VIDAL

Reviewers . . . actually newspaper persons who chat about books in the press. They have been with us from the beginning and they will be with us at the end. They are interested in writers, not writing. In goodmorals, not good art. When they like something of mine I grow suspicious and wonder.

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INTERVIEWER

One of the comments sometimes made is that your real position—your greatest talent—is as an essayist. How would you answer that?

VIDAL

My novels are quite as good as my essays. Unfortunately, to find out if a novel is good or bad you must first read it and that is not an easy thing to do nowadays. Essays, on the other hand, are short and people do read them.

INTERVIEWER

You once said the novel is dead.

VIDAL

That was a joke. What I have said repeatedly is that the *audience* for the novel is demonstrably diminishing with each passing year. That is a fact. It is not the novel that is declining, but the audience for it. It's like saying poetry has been declining for 50 years. Poetry hasn't. But the audience has. The serious novel is now almost in the same situation as poetry. Eventually the novel will simply be an academic exercise, written by academics to be used in classrooms in order to test the ingenuity of students. A combination of Rorschach test and anagram. Hence, the popularity of John Barth, a perfect U. novelist whose books are written to be taught, not to be read.

INTERVIEWER

As long as we're on Barth, let me ask you what you think of your contemporaries, people in your generation, people in their forties?

VIDAL

You must realize that anything I *say* (as opposed to write) about other novelists is governed by my current mood of jaunty disgust—which is quite impartial, cheerful, even loving. But totally unreliable as criticism—putting

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me in the great tradition of American journalism, now that I think of it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read your contemporaries? Do you read their new works as they come out?

VIDAL

I wouldn't say that I am fanatically attentive. There's only one living writer in English that I entirely admire, and that's William Golding. Lately I've been reading a lot of Italian and French writers. I particularly like Italo Calvino.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you think Golding good?

VIDAL

Well, his work is intensely felt. He holds you completely line by line, image by image. In *The Spire* you see the church that is being built, smell the dust. You are present at an event that exists only in his imagination. Very few writers have ever had this power. When the priest reveals his sores, you see them, feel the pain. I don't know how he does it.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever met him?

VIDAL

Once, yes. We had dinner together in Rome. Oxford Don type. I like his variety: each book is quite different from the one before it. This confuses critics and readers, but delights me. For that reason I like to read Fowles—though he is not in Golding's class. Who else do I read for pleasure? I always admire Isherwood. I am not given to mysticism—to understate wildly, but he makes me see something of what he would see. I read P.G. Wodehouse for pleasure. Much of Anthony Burgess. Brigid Brophy. Philip Roth when he is at his most demented. I like comic writers obviously. I re-read Evelyn Waugh . . .

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INTERVIEWER

Were you influenced by Waugh?

VIDAL

Perhaps. I was given *Scoop* in 1939 and I thought it the funniest book I'd ever read. I used to re-read it every year. Of the American writers—well, I read Saul Bellow with admiration. He never quite pulls off a book for me but he's interesting—which is more than you can say for so many of the other Jewish Giants, carving their endless Mt. Rushmores out of halvah. Calder Willingham I've always liked—that frantic heterosexuality. There must be a place for his sort of thing in American literature. I've never understood why he was not an enormously popular writer.

INTERVIEWER

You have known a good many writers. Is there anything to be got from knowing other writers, personally?

VIDAL

I don't think so. When I was young I wanted to meet the famous old writers that I admired. So I met Gide, Forster, Cocteau and Santayana. I sent Thomas Mann a book. He sent me a polite letter with my name misspelled. I never expected to "learn" anything from looking at them. Rather it was a laying-on of hands. A connection with the past. I am perhaps more conscious of the past than most American writers, and need the dead for comfort.

INTERVIEWER

Do you enjoy being with other writers? Henry James once said, for example, that Hawthorne was handicapped because he was isolated from other writers.

VIDAL

Yes, I like the company of other writers. Christopher Isherwood, Tennessee Williams and Paul Bowles have been friends. But I am not so sure James meant that Haw-

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thorne's isolation had to do with not knowing other writers. I think James meant that the American scene was culturally so thin that it was hard to develop intellectually if you had nobody to talk to. This explains the solipsistic note in the work of so many American writers. They think they are the only ones in the world to doubt the existence of God, say—like Mark Twain, for instance.

INTERVIEWER

Who was the first writer you ever met?

VIDAL

Well, growing up in Washington, a lot of journalists came to the house. Walter Lippmann, Arthur Krock, Drew Pearson . . . But I did not think much of journalists. I was more interested in Michael Arlen who used to come and play bridge. A splendid, rather ornate, Beerbohmesque dandy. And by no means a bad writer. I was fascinated recently by *Exiles*, his son's book about him. One summer before the war we were all at the Homestead Hotel in Hot Springs, Virginia, where Michael and Atalanta Arlen were much admired by everyone, including my mother and her husband Hugh Auchincloss. But to my astonishment, I now read that the boy was embarrassed by them—they were too dark, flashy, exotic—not pink and square like the American gentry. Like us, I suppose. Life is odd. Michael's son wanted for a father a stockbroker named Smith while I would've given anything if his father had been my father —well, *step*father.

INTERVIEWER

But later, on your own, whom did you meet, know . . .

VIDAL

I was still in uniform when I met Anais Nin in 1945. I refer you to the pages of her diary for that historic encounter. I thought she was marvelous but didn't much like her writing. Years later, reading her journals, I was horrified to discover that she felt the same about me. In '48 I

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met Tennessee in Rome, at the height of his fame. We traveled about in an old jeep. I have never laughed more with anyone, but can't say that I learned anything from him or anyone else. That process is interior. Paradoxically, in the ten years that I wrote for television, theater, movies, I learned how to write novels. Also, writing three mystery novels in one year taught me that nothing must occur in narrative which is not of use. Ironic that the lesson of Flaubert—which I thought that I had absorbed—I did not really comprehend until I was pot-boiling.

INTERVIEWER

You have described meeting E.M. Forster at King's College . . .

VIDAL

I met him first at a party for Isherwood. London '48. Forster was very excited at meeting Tennessee and not at all at meeting me—which I considered unfair since I had read and admired all his books while Tennessee, I fear, thought that he was in the presence of the author of Captain Horatio Hornblower. Part of Tennessee's wisdom is to read nothing at all. Anyway Forster, looking like an old river rat, zeroed in on Tennessee and said how much he admired *Streetcar*. Tennessee gave him a beady look. Forster invited us to King's for lunch. Tennessee rolled his eyes and looked at me. Yes, I said quickly. The next day I dragged Tennessee to the railroad station. As usual with Tennessee, we missed the first train. The second train would arrive in half an hour. Tennessee refused to wait. "But we *have* to go," I said, "He's sitting on one of the lions in front of the college, waiting for us." Tennessee was not moved by this poignant tableau. "I can't," he said, gulping and clutching his heart—when Tennessee does not spit blood he has heart spasms. "Besides," said Tennessee primly, wandering off in the wrong direction for the exit, "I cannot abide old men with urine stains on their trousers." I went on alone. I have described that grim day in *Two Sisters*.

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INTERVIEWER

You seem to still see this scene vividly. Do you think of the writer as a constant observer and recorder?

VIDAL

Well, I am not a camera, no. I don't consciously watch anything and I don't take notes though I briefly kept a diary. What I remember I remember—by no means the same thing as remembering what you would like to.

INTERVIEWER

How do you see yourself in an age of personality-writers, promoting themselves and their work? For instance, Capote says he is an expert at promoting books and gaining the attention of the media.

VIDAL

Every writer ought to have at least one thing that he does well and I'll take Truman's word that a gift for publicity is the most glittering star in his diadem. I'm pretty good at promoting my views on television but a washout at charming the bookchatters. But then I don't really try. Years ago Mailer solemnly assured me that to be a 'great' writer in America you had to be fairly regularly on the cover of the *Sunday New York Times Book Section*. Nothing else mattered. Anyway, he is now what he wanted to be: the patron saint of bad journalism and I am exactly what I set out to be—a novelist.

INTERVIEWER

Where do you place Nabokov?

VIDAL

I admire him very much. I'm told he returns the compliment. We do exchange stately insults in the press. Shortly after I announced that I was contributing $100 to the Angela Davis Defense fund in Nabokov's name—to improve his image—he responded by assuring an interviewer from the *N.Y. Times* that I had become a Roman Catholic. It is

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curious that Russia's two greatest writers—Nabokov and Pushkin—should both have had Negro blood.

INTERVIEWER

Have you read *Ada*?

VIDAL

No one has read *Ada*. But I very much admired *Transparent Things*. It is sad that the dumb Swedes gave their merit badge to Solzhenitsyn instead of Nabokov. Perfect example, by the way, of the unimportance of a writer's books to his career.

INTERVIEWER

How about some of the younger writers? What do you think of John Updike, for example?

VIDAL

He writes so well that I wish he could attract my interest. I like his prose and disagree with Mailer who thinks it bad. Mailer said it was the kind of bad writing that people who don't know much about writing think is good. It is an observation that I understand, but don't think applies to Updike. With me the problem is that he doesn't write about anything that interests me. I am not concerned with middle-class suburban couples. On the other hand, I'm not concerned with adultery in the French provinces either. Yet Flaubert commands my attention. I don't know why Updike doesn't. Perhaps my fault.

INTERVIEWER

Are there others of the younger generation who are perhaps less well-known whom you like?

VIDAL

Alison Lurie. Viva's autobiography . . .

INTERVIEWER

Andy Warhol's superstar?

VIDAL

Yes. And it's marvelous. Part fiction, part tape re-

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cording, part this, part that, gloriously obscene. Particularly interesting about her Catholic girlhood in upstate New York. Her father beating her up periodically beneath the bleeding heart of Jesus. And those great plaster Virgins that he had all over the lawn, lit up at night with 3,000 candles. That kind of thing appeals to me more than stately, careful novels.

INTERVIEWER

You came out of the Second World War. What do you think of the writers of the previous generation, Hemingway, for example?

VIDAL

I detest him, but I was certainly under his spell when I was very young, as we all were. I thought his prose was perfect—until I read Stephen Crane and realized where he got it from. Yet Hemingway is still the master self-publicist, if Capote will forgive me. Hemingway managed to convince everybody that before Hemingway everyone wrote like—who?—Gene Stratton Porter. But not only was there Mark Twain before him, there was also Stephen Crane who did everything that Hemingway did and rather better. Certainly *The Red Badge of Courage* is superior to *A Farewell to Arms*. But Hemingway did put together an hypnotic style whose rhythm haunted other writers. I liked some of the travel things—*Green Hills of Africa*. But he never wrote a good novel I suppose, finally, the thing I most detest in him is the spontaneity of his cruelty. The way he treated Fitzgerald, described in *The Moveable Feast*. The way he condescended to Ford Madox Ford, one of the best novelists in our language.

INTERVIEWER

What are your feelings about the so-called great writers of the 20th century, Hemingway aside? You didn't like Faulkner, I take it.

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VIDAL

I like mind and fear rhetoric—I suppose because I have a tendency to rhetoric. I also come from a Southern family—back in Mississippi the Gores were friends of the Faulkners, all Snopeses together. In fact, when I read Faulkner I think of my grandfather's speeches in the Senate, of a floweriness that I have done my best to pluck from my own style—along with the weeds.

INTERVIEWER

How about Fitzgerald?

VIDAL

If you want to find a place for him, he's somewhere between Maurice Baring and Evelyn Waugh. I like best what he leaves out of *The Great Gatsby*. A unique book. Incidentally, I think screenwriting taught him a lot. But who cares what he wrote? It is his life that matters. Books will be written about him long after his own work has vanished—again and again we shall be told of the literary harvest god who was devoured at summer's end in the hollywoods.

INTERVIEWER

You said you thought you had been influenced by Waugh, but weren't quite sure how. Who else has influenced you? Either now or years ago.

VIDAL

Oh, God, it's so hard to list them. As I said, by the time I got to *The Judgment of Paris* I was myself. Yet I'm always conscious that literature is, primarily, a chain of connection from the past to the present. It is not reinvented every morning as some bad writers like to believe. My own chain or literary genealogy would be something like this: Petronius, Juvenal, Apuleius—then Shakespeare—then Peacock, Meredith, James, Proust. Yet the writers I like the most influenced me the least. How can you be influenced by Proust? You can't. He's inimitable.

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At one point Thomas Mann fascinated me; thinking he was imitable, I used to compose Socratic dialogues in what I thought was his manner. One reason for rewriting *The City and the Pillar* was to get rid of those sombre exchanges.

INTERVIEWER

How much do you think college English courses can influence a career. Or teach one about the Novel?

VIDAL

I don't know. I never went to college. But I have lectured on campuses for a quarter century and it is my impression that after taking a course in The Novel, it is an unusual student who would ever want to read a novel again. Those English courses are what have killed literature for the public. Books are made a duty. Imagine teaching novels! Novels used to be written simply to be read. It was assumed until recently that there was a direct connection between writer and reader. Now that essential connection is being mediated—bugged?—by English Departments. Well, who needs the mediation? Who needs to be taught how to read a contemporary novel? Either you read it becuase you want to or you don't. Assuming of course that you can read anything at all. But this business of taking novels apart in order to show bored children how they were put together—there's a madness to it. Only a literary critic would benefit and there are never more than ten good critics in the United States at any given moment. So what is the point to these desultory autopsies performed according to that little set of instructions at the end of each text? Have you seen one? What symbols to look for? What does the author mean by the word "white"? I look at the notes appended to my own pieces in anthologies and know despair.

INTERVIEWER

How would you "teach" the novel?

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VIDAL

I would teach world civilization—east and west—from the beginning to the present. This would occupy the college years—would be the spine to my educational system. Then literature, economics, art, science, philosophy, religion would be dealt with naturally, sequentially, as they occurred. After four years, the student would have at least a glimmering of what our race is all about.

INTERVIEWER

If you were teaching one of those 'desultory' courses, how would you describe your style?

VIDAL

As a novelist I have a certain mimetic gift. I can impersonate a number of characters. In *Myra Breckinridge* there are two different voices. One for Buck Loner, one for Myra—neither mine. On the other hand, when I write an essay the style is my own—whatever that is, for the subject often imposes its own rhythm on my sentences. Yet I can usually spot my own style, and tell if a word's been changed.

INTERVIEWER

*Two Sisters* is hard to categorize and put in any tradition. You call it a memoir in the form of a novel, or novel in the form of a memoir. What led you to write in that form?

VIDAL

It created its own form as I went along. I didn't feel that a straightforward memoir would be interesting to do. On the other hand, I don't like *romans à clef*. They're usually a bit of a cheat. You notice I keep talking not about the effect my writing is going to have on others but the effect it has on me. I don't really care whether I find a form that enchants others as much as I care about finding something that can delight me from day to day as I work it out. I was constantly fascinated and perplexed while writing that book. It's done with mirrors. One thing re-

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flects another thing. Each of the three sections is exactly the same story, no different, but each section *seems* to be different. Each section contains exactly the same characters, though not always in the same guise.

INTERVIEWER

It's typical of your newer novels that you make such use of interjected letters, tape recordings, and diaries. Do you find that technique easier, or better or preferable to a straight narrative?

VIDAL

It makes for immediacy. I know how difficult it is for the average American to read anything. And I'm speaking of the average 'educated' person. It is not easy for him to cope with too dense a text on the page. I think the eye tires easily. After all, everyone under thirty-five was brought up not reading books but staring at television. So I am forced to be ingenious, to hold the reader's attention. I think I probably made an error using the screenplay form for part of *Two Sisters*.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

VIDAL

I'm told it was hard to read. Poor Anthony Burgess, following me, has just made the same mistake with *Clockwork Testament*. Also, I kept saying all through the book what a bad screenplay it was. Predictably, the reaction was, well, if *he* says it's a bad screenplay, why, it really must be a bad screenplay and so we better not read the bad screenplay. One must never attempt irony this side of the water.

INTERVIEWER

But you do in your work, on television . . .

VIDAL

Yes. And it has done me no good. In America the race

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goes to the loud, the solemn, the hustler. If you think you're a great writer, you must say that you are. Some will disagree of course but at least everyone will know that you're serious about your work. Speak of yourself with the slightest irony, self-deprecation, and you will be thought frivolous—perhaps even a bad person. Anyway, the playing around with letters and tapes and so on is just . . . I keep coming back to the only thing that matters: interesting myself.

INTERVIEWER

What about writing in the third person?

VIDAL

I wonder if it is still possible—in the sense that Henry James used it. *Washington, D.C.* was my last attempt to write a book like that—and I rather admire *Washington, D.C.* After all, that was the time I got into the ring with Proust and I knocked the little fag on his ass in the first round. Then I kneed old Leo T. the Great and on a technical K.O. got the championship. Funny thing, this being the best . . . . But even the world champ had a tough time licking *Washington, D.C.* The third person imposed a great strain on me, the constant maneuvering of so many consciousnesses through the various scenes while trying to keep the focus right. It was like directing a film on location with a huge cast in bad weather.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel more at home with the first person novel now? Do you think you'll continue with it?

VIDAL

Since I've done it recently in *Burr* and again in *Myron* I'll probably *not* do it again, but who knows? The second person certainly holds few charms. Perhaps no pronouns at all!

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INTERVIEWER

What sets you apart, do you think, from other American writers?

VIDAL

My interest in Western civilization. Except for Thorton Wilder, I can think of no contemporary American who has any interest in what happened before the long present he lives in, and records. Also, perhaps paradoxically, I value invention highly, and hardly anyone else does. I don't think I have ever met an American novelist who didn't, sooner or later, say when discussing his own work, "Well, I really knew someone exactly like that. That was the way it happened, the way I wrote it." He is terrified that you might think he actually made up a character, that what he writes might not be literally as opposed to imaginatively true. I think part of the bewilderment American bookchat writers have with me is that they realize that there's something strange going on that ought no to be going on—that *Myra Breckinridge* might just possibly be a work of the imagination. "You mean you never knew *anyone* like that? Well, if you didn't, how could you write it?"

INTERVIEWER

*Two Sisters*, however, does invite that intense search for clues you abhor. You meant for it to, didn't you? You wonder who is who and what's what.

VIDAL

It would be unnatural if people didn't. After all it is a memoir as well as a novel. But mainly it is a study in vanity and our attempts to conquer death through construction or through destruction. Herostratus does it in one way, and I do it in another—at least, the self that I use in the book. Erich does it in yet another way. Those girls, each has her own view of how she's going to evade death and achieve immortality. And it's all a comedy from the point of view of a stoic writer like myself.

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INTERVIEWER

Can you tell me about your work habits? You must be enormously disciplined to turn out so much in such a relatively short time. Do you find writing easy? Do you enjoy it?

VIDAL

Oh, yes, of course I enjoy it. I wouldn't do it if I didn't. Whenever I get up in the morning I write for about three hours. I write novels in longhand on yellow legal pads, exactly like the First Criminal Nixon. For some reason I write plays and essays on the typewriter. The first draft usually comes rather fast. One oddity: I never reread a text *until I have finished the first draft. Otherwise it's too dis*couraging. Also, when you have the whole thing in front of you for the first time, you've forgotten most of it and see it fresh. Re-writing, however, is a slow grinding business. For me the main pleasure of having money is being able to afford as many completely re-typed drafts as I like. When I was young and poor, I had to do my own typing, so I seldom did more than two drafts. Now I go through four, five, six. The more the better since my style is very much one of after-thought. My line to Dwight Macdonald: "You have nothing to say, only to add" really referred to me. Not until somebody did a parody of me, did I realize how dependent I am on the parenthetic aside—the comment upon the comment, the ironic gloss upon the straight line, or the straight rendering of a comedic point. It is a style which must seem rather pointless to my contemporaries because they see no need for this kind of elaborateness. But, again, it's the only thing I find interesting to do.

Hung-over or not, I write every day for three hours after I get up until I'm finished whatever I'm doing. Although sometimes I take a break in the middle of the book, sometimes a break of several years. I began *Julian*—I don't remember—but I think some seven years passed between the beginning of the book and when I picked it up

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again. The same thing occurred with *Washington, D.C.* On the other hand, *Myra* I wrote practically at one sitting—in a few weeks. It wrote itself, as they say. But then it was much re-written.

INTERVIEWER

Do you block out a story in advance. And do characters ever run away from you?

VIDAL

When I first started writing I used to plan everything in advance, not only chapter to chapter but page to page. Terribly constricting . . . like doing a film from someone else's meticulous treatment. About the time of *The Judgment of Paris*, I started improvising. I began with a mood. A sentence. The first sentence is all important. *Washington, D.C.* began with a dream—a summer storm at night in a garden above the Potomac—that was Merrywood where I grew up. With *Julian* and with *Burr* I was held to historical facts. Still, I found places where I could breathe and make up new things. My *Burr* is not the real Burr anymore than Henry Steele Commanger's *Jefferson* is the real Jefferson. By and large history tends to be rather poor fiction—except at its best. The *Peloponnesian War* is a great novel about people who actually lived.

INTERVIEWER

In your novel *Messiah* . . .

VIDAL

I didn't know the end of the book when I started writing. Yet when I got to the last page I suddenly wrote "I was he whom the world awaited" and it was all at once clear to me that the hidden meaning of the story was the true identity of the narrator which had been hidden from him, too. *He* was the messiah who might have been. When I saw this coming out upon the page, I shuddered (usually I laugh as I write, knew awe for I had knocked both Huxley and Orwell out of the ring. Incidentally, ninety per

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cent of your readers will not detect the irony in my boxing metaphors. And there is nothing to be done about it.

INTERVIEWER

Except for me to interject that you are playing off the likes of Hemingway and Mailer in the use of them. Shall I go on? Do you keep notebooks?

VIDAL

I make a few pages of notes for each novel. Phrases. Names. Character descriptions. Then I seldom look again at the notes. At the end of each work-day I do make notes on what the next day's work will be. I've a memory like a sieve. Under a pseudonym (Edgar Box) I wrote three mystery books in 1952–I was very broke. Halfway through the last one I forgot who the murderer was and had to find a substitute.

INTERVIEWER

What do you start with? A character, a plot?

VIDAL

*Myra* began with a first sentence. I was so intrigued by that sentence that I had to go on. Who was she? What did she have to say? A lot, as it turned out. The unconscious mind certainly shaped that book.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find any difficulties in writing about America and Americans when you are out of the country so much?

VIDAL

Well, I think others would notice my lapses before I did. Anyway I come back quite often and my ears are pretty much attuned to the American . . . scream. But then I've been involved in one way or another with every election for nearly twenty years. And I spend at least two months each year lecturing across the country.

INTERVIEWER

Besides the pleasures of living, are there any advantages

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in terms of perspective for the writer who lives outside the country?

VIDAL

For me, every advantage. If I lived in America, I would be a politician 24 hours a day, minding everybody else's business and getting no work done. Also, there are pleasures to this sort of anonymity one has in a foreign city. And it's nice to be always coping with a language you don't speak very well. Occasionally I regret it when I'm with someone like Moravia who speaks so rapidly and intricately in Italian that I can never follow him.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think generally about the writer *engage*? Should a writer be involved in politics, as you are?

VIDAL

It depends on the writer. Most American writers are not much involved, beyond signing petitions. They are usually academics—and cautious. Or full-time *literary* politicians. Or both. The main line of our literature is quotidianal with a vengeance. Yes, many great novels have been written about the everyday—Jane Austen and so on. But you need a superb art to make that sort of thing interesting. So, failing superb art, you'd better have a good mind and you'd better be interested in the world outside yourself. D.H. Lawrence wrote something very interesting about the young Hemingway. Called him a brilliant writer. But he added: he's essentially a photographer and it will be interesting to see how he ages because the photographer can only keep on taking pictures from the outside. One of the reasons that the gifted Hemingway never wrote a good novel was that nothing interested him except a few sensuous experiences like killing things and fucking—interesting things to do but not all that interesting to write about. This sort of artist runs into trouble very early on because all he can really write about is himself and after

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youth that self—unengaged in the world—is of declining interest. Admittedly Hemingway chased after wars but he never had much of anything to say about war, unlike Tolstoi or even Malraux. I think that the more you know the world and the wider the net you cast in your society, the more interesting your books will be, certainly the more interested you will be.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think of your novels as *political* novels?

VIDAL

Of course not. I am a politician when I make a speech or write a piece to promote a political idea. In a novel like *Burr* I'm not composing a polemic about the founding fathers. Rather I am describing the way men who want power respond to one another, to themselves. The other books—the inventions like *Myra* are beyond politics, in the usual sense at least.

INTERVIEWER

Are you interested in the other arts at all? In painting, sculpture, music, opera, dance?

VIDAL

Architecture, for one. I'm fascinated by the ancient Roman Empire amongst whose ruins I live. I've been in every city and town of Italy, and I suppose I've been into nearly every Roman church. I particularly like mosaics. I am not musical. This means I very much like opera. And baroque organ music, very loud. I like ballet but in Rome it's bad. In painting, I'm happiest with Piero della Francesca. I hate abstract painting. In sculpture, well, the Medici tombs—I had a small talent for sculpture when I was young.

INTERVIEWER

Does it help a writer to be in love? To be rich?

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VIDAL

Love is not my bag. I was debagged at twenty-five and turned to sex and art, perfectly acceptable substitutes. Absence of money is a bad thing because you end up writing the "Telltale Clue" on television—which I did. Luckily I was full of energy in those days. I used to write a seventy thousand word mystery novel in ten days. Money gives one time to rewrite books until they are 'done'—or abandoned. Money also gave me the leisure to become an essayist. I spend more time on a piece for the *New York Review of Books* than I ever did on, let us say, a television play. If my essays are good it is because they are entirely voluntary. I write only what I want to . . . except of course in those money-making days at MGM—composing *Ben Hur*.

INTERVIEWER

But how about the movies? You're still writing for movies, aren't you?

VIDAL

Yes. I love movies, and I think a lot about movies. Recently I thought I would like to direct. More recently, I have decided it's too late. I am like the Walter Lippmanns. I saw them a few years ago. They were euphoric. Why? "Because," she said, "we have decided that we shall *never* go to Japan. Such a relief!"

INTERVIEWER

Why do you prefer movies to the theater?

VIDAL

I'm embarrassed by live actors. They're always having a much better time than I am. Also, few plays are very interesting while almost any movie is interesting—if just to watch the pictures. But then I'm typically American. We weren't brought up with theater like the English or the Germans. On the other hand, I saw every movie I could in my youth. I once saw four movies in one day when I was 14. That was the happiest day of my life.

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INTERVIEWER

Have you ever thought of acting, as Norman Mailer does?

VIDAL

Is *that* what he does? I have always been curious. Well, I appeared briefly in my own *The Best Man*. I also appeared in *Fellini Roma*, as myself. I made no sense, due to the cutting, but the movie was splendid anyway. I have been offered the lead in Ustinov's new play for New York. To play an American president. What else? I said no. For one thing, I cannot learn dialogue.

INTERVIEWER

Has your writing been influenced by films?

VIDAL

Every writer of my generation has been influenced by films. I think I've written that somewhere. Find out the movies a man saw between 10 and 15, which ones he liked, disliked, and you would have a pretty good idea of what sort of mind and temperament he has. If he happened to be a writer, you would be able to find a good many influences though not perhaps as many as Professor B.F. Dick comes up with in his recent study of me[2]—a brilliant job, all in all. Myra would've liked it.

INTERVIEWER

What did you see between 10 and 15?

VIDAL

I saw everything. But I was most affected by George Arliss. Particularly his Disraeli. I liked all those historical fictions that were done in the thirties. Recently I saw my favorite *Cardinal Richelieu* for the first time in thirty years on the Late Show. Absolute chloroform.

INTERVIEWER

Well, you seem to have had an enormous knowledge of movies for *Myra*. Did you have to go back and research any of that?

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[2] *The Apostate Angel: A Critical Study of Gore Vidal*, by Bernard F. Dick (Random House, 1974).

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VIDAL

I saw all those movies of the forties—in the forties. At school and in the Army. They're seared on my memory. There wasn't anything in the book that I did not see first time around. Also—to help the PhD thesis writers—almost every picture I mentioned can be found in Parker Tyler's *Magic and Myth of the Movies*. A work which has to be read to be believed.

INTERVIEWER

Have you ever had any trouble with writer's block?

VIDAL

No.

INTERVIEWER

When you get up in the morning to write, do you just sit down and start out with your pen? You don't have any devices you use to . . . ?

VIDAL

First coffee. Then a bowel movement. Then the muse joins me.

INTERVIEWER

You don't sharpen pencils or anything like that?

VIDAL

No. But I often read for an hour or two. Clearing the mind. I'm always reluctant to start work, and reluctant to stop. The most interesting thing about writing is the way that it obliterates time. Three hours seem like three minutes. Then there is the business of surprise. I never know what is coming next. The phrase that sounds in the head changes when it appears on the page. Then I start probing it with a pen, finding new meanings. Sometimes I burst out laughing at what is happening as I twist and turn sentences.

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Strange business, all in all. One never gets to the end of it. That's why I go on, I suppose. To see what the next sentences I write will be.

GERALD CLARKE

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# Peter Ardery (1943-1974)

On July 15th, Peter Ardery died in his hotel room in Bombay, India. He was 31 years old. For five years (1965-1970) he had been an editor of this magazine and when he left his name was kept on the masthead as a tribute to his efforts on its behalf. He came to the magazine from Harvard where he had graduated in 1964. It was typical of his interest in the less traditional enterprises and his disinclination to take the sort of establishment position he had been trained for that he joined the magazine and worked for the smallest of salaries. For two years he ran the Paris Review booth at the New York World's Fair—a toad-stool-like kiosk ("the smallest pavilion at the Fair") which stood outside the French Exhibition Hall. The first year, literary magazines and books were on sale at the booth and on bad days there were no receipts at all. When it rained, the roof was lowered to keep the displays from getting wet and the salesgirls (invariably very pretty girls discovered by Ardery) peeked out, just their eyes shining. The following year the merchandise was more varied—a desperate catch-all of travel posters and kites and copies of *L'Express* and *Paris-Match*. Ardery ran the lunatic enterprise (which was supposed to provide a source of income to the magazine) with grace and humor and a dogged persistence . . . as if these qualities could match the high-pitched business acumen on display at the towering edifices nearby. Ardery was always interested in the underdog. In the councils of this magazine (and in the administration of the American Literary Anthology of which he was a co-editor) his concern was always with poets and writers who seemed to have no representation. He was a valued friend to them.

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In the summer of 1970 Ardery left the magazine and took a long trip around the world to try to decide what he wanted to do. He lived for a number of months with a Ceylonese fishing family—his reading limited to the only book in English he could find . . . a Red Cross Manual of medicine. It was at this point that he began keeping a *pro* and *con* list in his diary about a possible career in medicine. The *pro* list was longer, and in 1970, at the age of 27, Ardery went back to Harvard and started afresh with the necessary science curriculum. In 1972 he entered the medical school at the University of Kentucky, Lexington. His plan when he finished—not surprisingly—was to work with the dispossessed; his friends said that he planned to take his internship in Bombay.

His loss has been hard to accept. His death—from a reaction to some opium he was experimenting with—produced more anger than sorrow amongst his friends . . . perhaps an understandable reaction since after years of meandering in his delightful and yet meaningful manner he had settled so firmly on what he wanted to do. He was the vice-president of his class at Kentucky. There, as everywhere, he was making his mark.

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

## FICTION

**Frederick Bush** *(Window Water)* is the author of *Manual Labor* (published this fall by New Directions), *I Wanted a Year Without Fall* (Calder and Boyars), and *Breathing Trouble* (Calder and Boyars), and also of *Hawkes: A Guide to His Fictions* (Syracuse University Press). He lives in Poolville, New York.

**Lamar Herrin** *(The Rio Loja Ringmaster)* is an English teacher who lives in Cincinati with his Spanish wife and two-year-old son. *The Rio Loja Ringmaster* is the first chapter of a novel to be published by Viking, and its publication marks his first appearance in print.

**Mike Kempton** *(Long Green)* "was born in Wilmington, N.C. in August of 1944, and went to Harvard, from which he graduated *summa cum laude*, worked one year (1964) for Tom Winship at the *Globe*, was in the Resistance, was a social investigator for the Department of Social Welfare in New York, married Jeanne Goldschmidt and was on his way to Mexico with her when they were killed in an auto accident near Petersbury, Va., on November 26, 1971." (from a letter to *The Paris Review* by his father, Murray Kempton).

**Ray Russell** *(Rational Moments)* is the author of two novels, *The Case Against Satan* (1962) and *The Colony* (1969), a dozen screen plays over seventy short stories. His most recent collection of short fiction was *Sagittarius* (1971). He is a Contributing Editor to *Playboy* and lives in Beverly Hills, California.

**David Shaber** *(Progress Report)* is the author of several screen plays for Otto Preminger. His short stories have appeared in three *O'Henry* Collections. He is a Contributing Editor to *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, and lives in New York City.

## INTERVIEW

**Gerald Clarke** is on the staff of *Time* and has also written for *Esquire, The New Republic, Atlantic and Rolling Stone*. He lives in New York City.

## POETRY

**Ameen Alwan** currently at work on a book of translations, has been published in *The Kenyon Review, The Nation, TriQuarterly, Chelsea, Kayak, The Minnesota Review,* and *The New Republic*. He lives in Altadena, California.

**Paul Anderson** tells us that he is currently a janitor in Chicago unless he has died or moved. The poem in this issue marks his first appearance in print.

**Maxine Chernoff**, a high school teacher in Chicago, is the associate editor of *Oink* magazine. She recently received her M.A. in English.

**W.K. Engel** is just completing a collection of poetry, *The Night Has a Thousand Voices*. Living now in Bethesda, Maryland, he has published numerous articles and poems.

**Albert Goldbarth** recently joined the creative writing faculty at Cornell Uni-

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versity. His three books are *Coprolites* (New Rivers), *Optricks* (Seven Woods), and *Jan. 31* (Doubleday).

**Thomas Johnson** is the editor of *Stinktree*. His most recent book is *Ground Zero*, to be published this fall by West Coast Poetry Review Press. He is currently studying for his MFA in Creative Writing at Cornell.

**Erica Jong** is the author of two books of poems, *Fruits & Vegetables* and *Half-Lives*, and a novel, *Fear of Flying*. A just-completed book, *Dearest Man-in-the-Moon*, which includes these poems, is forthcoming. She lives in New York City.

**Greg Kuzma** is editing a collection of critical essays on the poems of Robert Frost. A collection of his poems, *Good News*, was published by Viking in 1970. New collections are due soon from The Basilisk Press, Cooper Canyon Press and The Cummington Press, and poems are forthcoming in *The American Scholar, Arts in Society, New Letters, Poetry Northwest,* and *The Columbia Forum*. This fall his Best Cellar Press Pamphlet series will be publishing books of poems by Roy Scheele, Lloyd Davis, and Wayne Dodd. He lives in Crete, Nebraska.

**Naomi Lazard**, currently at work on a new novel, was poet in residence at Kirkland Collage last year. Her first book was *Cry of the Peacocks* (Hiram Hayden). Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker, The American Review, Ms. Magazine, The Nation, The American Scholar, Harper's Bazaar*, and others. These poems are from a series called *Ordinances*. Ms. Lazard lives in New York City.

**David Lehman** teaches English at Columbia College. *Some Nerve* (Columbia Review Press) was published in 1973. He is at work on a book of prose poems entitled *The Sin Against the Holy Ghost* which includes "Greetings Where No Kindness Is."

**Molly McKaughan** has been published in *Ms., Works*, and other small magazines. She is Managing Editor of *The Paris Review*, and lives in New York City.

**Rush Rankin** has published poems in *The Minnesota Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, Epoch* and *The Carolina Quarterly*. He lives in Iowa City.

**Vern Rutsala** lives in Portland, Oregon. This is his first appearance in *The Paris Review*.

**Aram Saroyan** is the author of *The Street*, an autobiographical novel (The Bookstore Press), and *The Heart*, a collection of poems (Coach House Press), both published this fall. *Writing* a book of shorter prose pieces, will appear this winter (L Publications). He lives in Bolinas, California.

**Louis Simpson** is the author of many books of poems, including *Selected Poems* (Harcourt, Brace) which was awarded a Pulitzer Prize, and most recently *Adventures of the Letter I*, published in 1971 by Harper and Row. He is currently completing a critical study of the poetry of Eliot, Pound and Williams.

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**Albert Stainton** is co-editor of *Bartleby's Review*. His work has appeared in *Truck, Epoch, Shaman* and others. *The Crossing*, a chapbook, is forthcoming from Puckerbrush Press in Orono, Maine.

**Charles Webb** lives in Seattle, Washington, where he edits *Madrona* and is lead singer-guitarist for Johnny Saturn and the Electrics, a Fifties rock and roll band. He has an M.A. in English from the University of Washington, and his work has appeared in numerous little magazines.

## POETRY PORTFOLIO

**Ira Sadoff** has been published in *Poetry, Antaeus, The American Poetry Review, Antioch Review* and elsewhere. His first collection of poems, *Setting Down*, which includes these prose poems, will be published by Houghton Mifflin, Spring, 1975. He lives in Xenia, Ohio.

## ART

**Ed Baynard** was born in Washington, D.C. in 1940, and is now living in New York City. He exhibits his work at Fishbach Gallery. His first show was at the Willard Gallery in 1971, and his next exhibition of paintings will be at Fishbach in the spring of 1975. He is the friend of many poets and painters.

**William Wegman** was born in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1943. He shows his work at the Sonnabend Gallery, New York, and is noted for his videotapes, films and drawings. He lives in New York City.

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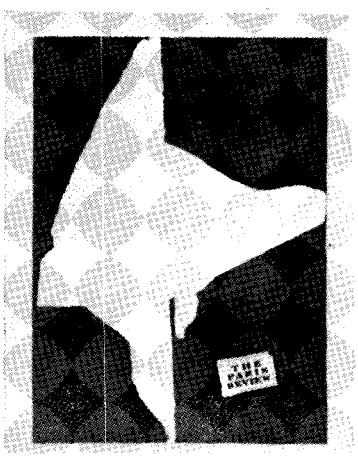

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